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THE PARADOX OF SELF-ANNIHILATING EXPRESSION : REPRESENTATIONS
OF ONTOLOGICAL INSTABILITY IN THE DRAMA OF SAMUEL BECKETT.

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I am grateful chiefly to Dr. Michael Bell, who supervised this thesis, and to my mother, Mrs. S. M. Lawley, who typed it. In addition I have benefited from conversations with friends, notably Mr. Vincent Mahon. All mistakes are, needless to say, my own.

I have acknowledged my debts, so far as I am aware of them, to previous writers on Beckett and his plays. However, my sense of Hugh Kenner's having so often "been there before me" in his Critical Study is something to which the accumulation of individual references cannot do proper justice.

It remains to be noted that, although I have included in my bibliography Deirdre Bair's Samuel Beckett : A Biography (1978) and Clas Zilliacus's Beckett and Broadcasting (1976), these books arrived to hand too late for use in the body of the thesis itself.

P.L.

SUMMARY

One of the central critical problems about Beckett — how can we praise without feeling uneasy the work of an artist for whom "to be an artist is to fail"? — parallels the creative predicament of a writer whose "art of failure" can only exist in an inherently expressive medium. How can an art which is anti-art remain true to itself? Is a truly self-annihilating expression possible?

Two perspectives on the problem are opened. The first is theoretical: a consideration of the Duthuit Dialogues confirms that Beckett refuses to countenance an art which survives by making artistic failure itself the occasion of artistic creation. Rather he "dreams" of a genuine "art of failure": without occasion, in-expressive and indefinable. The second perspective (itself suggested by Beckett's critical tendency in the Duthuit Dialogues) is literary-historical: pertinent Romantic, nineteenth-century and Modernist attitudes towards artistic failure are outlined and briefly considered. Such a consideration serves both to define the particular (and unique) nature of Beckett's response to what may be seen as a traditional Romantic and Modernist problem, and to confirm the essentially ontological nature of what Beckett sees as the creative "obligation". (Failure to create as failure to be.)

The Beckettian creative predicament is thus considered next in terms of individual identity, by way of the recurring motif of the "imperfect birth", and the paradoxical quality of Beckett's response to his creative problem is most clearly seen in the theatre, where he needs to represent degrees of ontological absence in what has been seen as the medium of "presence".

Studies of the individual plays show that Beckett's method is to exploit the essence of theatre, which is playing, so as to suggest that the players are never really present, only playing, because obliged to play, over the void of (their own) identity. In order to render the creative-ontological situation of the imperfectly-born subject, Beckett seeks to produce, both in the text and the stage-picture and by a precise counterpointing of the two elements, the effect of parody presence.

Examination of the plays in chronological order illustrates a development towards abstraction and an increasing emphasis on shape and pattern. The central character becomes more and more obviously a creator and (by the same token) is revealed more and more clearly by the effect of parody presence as a created being, though imperfectly created. Thus theatrical presence is undermined and the Beckett play enacts its own self-annihilation.

He: "Certain things are no longer possible. The pretence of feeling as a compositional work of art, the self-satisfied pretence of music itself, has become impossible and no longer to be preserved - I mean the perennial notion that prescribed and formalized elements shall be introduced as though they were the inviolable necessity of the single case. Or put it the other way round: the special case behaving as though it were identical with the prescribed and familiar formula. For four hundred years all great music has found its satisfaction in pretending that this unity has been accomplished without a break - it has pleased itself with confusing the conventional universal law to which it is subject with its own peculiar concern. My friend it cannot go on...Music,..by untiringly conforming her specific concerns to the ruling conventions has as far as she could played a role in the highbrow swindle. The inclusion of expression in the general appeasement is the innermost principle of musical pretence. It is all up with it. The claim to consider the general harmonically contained in the particular contradicts itself. It is all up with the once blindingly valid conventions, which guaranteed the freedom of play."

I: "A man could know that and recognise freedom above and beyond all critique. He could heighten the play, by playing with forms out of which, as he well knew, life has disappeared."

He: "I know, I know. Parody. It might be fun, if it were not so melancholy in its aristocratic nihilism. Would you promise yourself much pleasure and profit from such tricks?"

I (retort angrily): "No."

Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus (1947).

INTRODUCTION

In an important review of nine critical books on Beckett in 1966, J.R. Harvey insisted upon what must be recognised as a central problem of Beckett criticism, a problem which affects everything that has been and will be said about Samuel Beckett's work. Noting that "the work of proving that Beckett is good" has never been done - a situation which obtains now (1978) as then - Harvey continues:

The work would certainly involve difficulties and complications: I am not thinking of those things in Beckett that I dislike, but of the ways in which the art is self-convicted - not true to itself. This does not refer primarily to the paradoxes in the doctrine of anti-art, for Mr Beckett's commitment to them is more nominal than real: the upshot, perhaps, of his desperate sense of being in an impasse, with no artistic genre to hand that suited his purpose. As an artist, he seems decidedly on the side of expression, and to succeed in expressing all there is in him to express. On the other hand, critics with a bias for theory, and committed to the anti-art approach - like Mr Federman and Mr Coe - must also be committed to resolving the inconsistency between their tributes to the poignant achieved expressiveness of his work and the technique they celebrate, which Mr Federman summarises -

the creator's mind now appears naked as it struggles with an inadequate form and language to perform a futile creative act. Failure and nothingness, the goals of this novel, become aesthetic experiences...(Journey to Chaos,¹ p.9.)

One cannot have it both ways: although we may feel that it is not so much his critics, as Mr Beckett himself, who tries to have it both ways. At all events, there does seem to be a confusion in his mind as to what art is that may have been damaging to the proper success of his ambitions?

After maintaining that Beckett seems "to succeed in expressing all there is in him to express" Harvey again becomes suspicious (in the penultimate sentence) - and I think rightly so. The possibility of dishonesty and insincerity ("self-convicted", "not true to itself", "having it both ways") hangs about Beckett's art more surely than even Harvey seems ready to admit. The irony of the claim that Beckett "seems decidedly on the side of expression" will I hope emerge in the course of this

study. At this early stage, however, all that is necessary is a brief indication that Beckett's commitment to "the doctrine of anti-art" is indeed real and not merely nominal, as Harvey suggests in an effort to extricate him. The word "doctrine" itself hints that the commitment might be other than real, might indeed be a luxury of theory rather than a creative necessity, however problematic. That "doctrine" is misleading and Beckett's commitment to "anti-art" (a phrase which properly belongs with "doctrine") more than nominal is I think borne out by a well-known passage from Molloy:

Yes, even then, when already all was fading, waves and particles, there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names. I say that now, but after all what do I know about then, now when the icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings, and the world dies too, foully named. All I know is what the words know, and the dead things, and that makes a handsome little sum, with a beginning, a middle and an end as in the well-built phrase and the long sonata of the dead. And truly it little matters what I say, this or that or any other thing. Saying is inventing. Wrong, very rightly wrong. You invent nothing, you think you are inventing, you think you are escaping, and all you do is stammer out your lesson, the remnants of a penum one day got by heart and long forgotten, life without tears, as it is wept. To hell with it anyway. Where was I. 3

Whilst few readers, I imagine, would think "dishonest" and "insincere" the right words to describe this kind of writing (I offer it as typical of Beckett's best prose), neither does the passage provide any easy or obvious resolution of the twofold problem: the sincerity of Beckett's best work ("Saying is inventing. Wrong, very rightly wrong.") and the contradiction implicit in the critic's speaking of any "best work" at all ("You invent nothing, you think you are inventing..."). Beckett's own formulation is often quoted with approval, but is it possible to praise with sincerity "the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, together with the obligation to express"? 4 In other words, how can we praise without (seemingly like the artist

himself) "having it both ways"? Beckett is apt to seem a strange and remote writer in all kinds of ways, but here at least his creative predicament is mirrored by our critical problem. The "anti-art" commitment is itself necessarily artistic. It is with the creative results of Beckett's own intense engagement with this paradox that the present study is concerned.

I want to approach the problem by establishing two converging perspectives on the Beckettian "art of failure". These related lines of approach will, I hope, combine to create the necessary context for critical discussion. I turn first to the text which contains Beckett's own theoretical pronouncements on this subject, the Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit (1949). Significantly, in view of what we have noted about the relation between the artistic predicament and the critical problem in the Beckettian context, Beckett speaks in the Three Dialogues not as artist (or "practitioner", as T.S.Eliot might have said) but as critic. The Three Dialogues is a reworking of conversations between the author and his friend the art-critic Georges Duthuit about three modern painters, Tal Coat, Masson and Bram van Velde. It is best approached as a little drama of ideas in three acts. In Act I (Tal Coat) the theme is stated: whilst "D" (Duthuit in the drama) argues that "the immense difference between the significance of perception for Tal Coat and its significance for the great majority of his predecessors" (p.102) constitutes a turning point in artistic creation which amounts to a "liberation" (p.101), "B" (Beckett in the drama) maintains that "the tendency and accomplishment of this painting (Tal Coat's) are fundamentally those of previous painting, straining to enlarge the statement of a compromise" (p.102). "Nature" for Tal Coat, as for all his predecessors is "a composite of perceiver and perceived, not a datum, an experience" (pp. 101-2). Thus for B.

the difference in artistic perception is only a "question of degree" (p.101), since "the only thing disturbed by the revolutionaries Matisse and Tal Coat is a certain order on the plane of the feasible".

D. - What other plane can there be for the maker?

B. - Logically none. Yet I speak of an art turning from it in disgust, weary of puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road.

D. - And preferring what?

B. - The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express. (p.103)

D. dismisses B.'s climactic paradox (for it is important that it should be recognised as such) as "a violently extreme and personal point of view, of no help to us in the matter of Tal Coat" (p.103) and closes the dialogue. End of exposition: we know D.'s position (affirmative), we know B.'s position (sceptical), and we know that the latter's notion of a "new art" is illogical ("Logically none.") - that is, that it cannot be expressed in the dialectical medium of words and reason except as a paradox: "the expression that there is nothing to express..."

In Act II (Masson) the theme is developed and the argument becomes more lively. For B., Masson is "an artist who seems literally skewered on the ferocious dilemma of expression. Yet he continues to wriggle." He suffers from "two old maladies that should no doubt be considered separately: the malady of wanting to know what to do and the malady of wanting to be able to do it" (p.110). His reluctance to admit his "anguish of helplessness", if the reason is because "it seems to contain in itself the impossibility of statement" (like B.'s own paradoxical position) is "again an exquisitely logical attitude" (p.110).

D. puts up a spirited defence of Masson, noting his search for "'openings, circulations, communications, unknown penetrations' - where he may frolic at his ease in freedom", having broken through the

"partitions" of objects "to that continuity of being which is absent from the ordinary experience of living" (p.111). In other words Masson (according to D.) actively seeks a form which will unite subject and object, thus healing the split felt in every day life (and referred to in the first dialogue by B.) between perceiver and perceived. But B. only retorts that "with such preoccupations [as ease and freedom] it seems to me impossible that he should ever do anything different from that which the best, including himself, have done already... So forgive me if I relapse, as when we spoke of the so different Tal Coat, into my dream of an art unresentful of its insuperable indigence and too proud for the farce of giving and receiving" (p.112). B. seems ready to end, but D. asks forcefully if we must really deplore an affirmative kind of painting in which "what is tolerable and radiant in the world may continue": "are we really to deplore the painting that is a rallying, among the things of time that pass and hurry us away, towards a time that endures and gives increase?" What can B. do but "exit weeping" (p.113)?

The argument against the art which preoccupies itself with "going a little further along" the "dreary road" of the possible, very occasionally admitting the impossible "as spice to the 'exploit'" (p.111), has been forcefully put by B. It only remains for him to define clearly the "art of a different order" which he invoked at the outset. Act III, like most third acts (though Beckett himself has none) brings the drama to its climax - which in this case is also an impasse. The subject is Beckett's friend the Dutchman Bram van Velde. B. does not know why van Velde is "obliged to paint" (p.119), but he suggests that, whereas "the assumption underlying all painting is that the domain of the maker is the domain of the feasible" (p.120), van Velde, having abandoned this "dreary road" and set out to accomplish the impossible creative act, "is the first whose painting is bereft, rid if you prefer,

of occasion in every shape and form, ideal as well as material, and the first whose hands have not been tied by the certitude that expression is an impossible act" (p.121). He "cannot paint, since he is obliged to paint" (p.119), "there is nothing to paint and nothing to paint with" (p.120). D. asks the obvious question :

D. - ...Are you suggesting that the painting of van Velde is inexpressive?

B. - (A fortnight later) Yes.

D. - You realise the absurdity of what you advance?

B. - I hope I do. (pp.120-1).

The rather lengthy pause before B.'s first reply, suggesting that the dialogue might have broken down completely at that point, is far more than just a joke. The reason for it (if "reason" is the right word) is plain: "inexpressive", which in critical discussion can only carry a negative charge, is clearly an inadequate word for Beckett's purposes - and even a fortnight's thought would not supply an adequate one. A whole new language is required to talk about the "new" art of van Velde, such is its novelty; a language willing and able to acknowledge positively an art which is literally inexpressive, which is, in other words, free of Hasson's "old maladies", "the malady of wanting to know what to do and the malady of wanting to be able to do it", which is without "occasion" of expression and thus without expression itself as we generally understand it. This is the art of pure being and no signification. For Beckett being and expression are antitheses, yet - here is the crucial point - expression is an "obligation".

D. makes a solid and, in view of what has been written about Beckett since, significant attempt to reclaim B.'s theory for the realm of rational discourse. (What other sort of discourse is there?) The resolution he offers is the one in which, as J. R. Harvey observes, most Beckett critics have either tacitly or openly acquiesced :

But might it not be suggested, even by one tolerant of this fantastic theory, that the occasion of his painting is his predicament, and that it is expressive of the impossibility to express? (p.121)

Or, in Harvey's words, can the artist not "have it both ways"? B.'s reply is characteristic in its disdainful mandarin astringency :

No more ingenious method could be devised for restoring him, safe and sound, to the bosom of Saint Luke. But let us, for once, be foolish enough not to turn tail. All have turned wisely tail, before the ultimate penury, back to the mere misery where destitute virtuous mothers may steal bread for their starving brats. There is more than a difference of degree between being short, short of the world, short of self, and being without. these esteemed commodities. The one is a predicament, the other not. (pp.121-2)

B. insists on retaining the paradoxicality of his initial statement. The kind of art he dreams of is not "expressive of the impossibility to express", at least, not in the ordinary, logical sense. Yet what it is he is loathe to say ("Would it not be enough if I simply went away?") (p.122), because we cannot say: "There are many ways in which the thing I am trying in vain to say may be tried in vain to be said" (p.123). Nevertheless he concludes with his most substantial statement of the problem, concentrating this time on the "occasion" of expression.

It is obvious that for the artist obsessed with his expressive vocation, anything and everything is doomed to become occasion, including, as is apparently to some extent the case with Masson, the pursuit of occasion...But if the occasion appears as an unstable term of relation, the artist, who is the other term, is hardly less so, thanks to his warren of modes and attitudes. The objections to this dualist view of the creative process are unconvincing. Two things are established, however precariously : the aliment, from fruits on plates to low mathematics and self-commiseration, and its manner of despatch. All that should concern us is the acute and increasing anxiety of the relation itself, as though shadowed more and more darkly by a sense of invalidity, of inadequacy, of existence at the expense of all that it excludes, all that it blinds to. The history of painting, here we go again, is the history of its attempts to escape from this sense of failure, by means of more authentic, more ample, less exclusive relations between representer and representee, in a kind of tropism towards a light as to the nature of which the best opinions continue to vary, and with a kind of Pythagorean terror, as though the irrationality of pi were an offence against the deity, not to mention his creature. (pp.124-5)

Van Velde, he claims, "is the first to desist from this estheticised automatism, the first to submit wholly to the incoercible absence of relation, in the absence of terms or, if you like, in the presence of unavailable terms, the first to admit that to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living" (p.125).

Cornered by the inescapable logicality of the linguistic medium, his own failure to pant on in the gross air of the possible, B. only wants to be left "to expire". But before the dialogue peters out in the predictable disclaimer ("Yes, yes, I am mistaken, I am mistaken", p.126), he folds up his "case" eloquently :

I know that all that is required now, in order to bring even this horrible matter to an acceptable conclusion, is to make of this submission, this admission, this fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new term of relation, and of the act which, unable to act, obliged to act, he makes, an expressive act, even if only of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation. I know that my inability to do so places myself, and perhaps an innocent, in what I think is still called an unenviable situation, familiar to psychiatrists. For what is this coloured plane, that was not there before. I don't know what it is, having never seen anything like it before. It seems to have nothing to do with art, in any case, if my memories are correct. (pp.125-6).

Still holding out against the blandishments of "the bosom of Saint Luke" in his refusal to abandon the creative impasse, all B. can do is fend off D.'s logic without putting anything in its place. A truly positive constataction is lacking. All he can offer is an enigmatic symboliste image: "For what is this coloured plane, that was not there before. I don't know what it is...."

It should be clear, even from the foregoing slight commentary, why Beckett chose to cast his conversations with Duthuit in dialogue form rather than synthesise them in an ordinary critical essay. His dilemma exactly mirrors that of the artists he discusses, for the medium in which he must state that which is impossible of statement is itself a medium which exercises the tyranny of the possible and refuses to admit failure. A critical essay on the subject, were it true to its subject, would be

either unwriteable or self-cancelling (as the novels are). Dialectical form, on the other hand, if it cannot facilitate the expression of the inexpressible, can at least be used to reveal the tyranny of the "field of the possible" which is language, and in that way enact the expressible (negative) part of what B. is saying. D. is the jealous guardian of this thick brick wall; or perhaps of the unpadded cell ("familiar to psychiatrists"?) inside which B. pricks against the kicks. It is intrinsic to B.'s whole position that, free from the "maladies" of wanting to know what to do and wanting to be able to do it, he should finally renounce so that, in the end at least, the pricks exceed the kicks.

Does this mean that the Beckett critic cannot write about his author's work without falsifying it? Not necessarily, since we do not face the kind of problem B. faces in his attempt to define van Velde's "achievement". B. maintains that art "on the plane of the feasible" is "doomed to become occasion" because of the artist's "expressive vocation". This is the moribund "old" art, tyrannised by and acquiescing in its inescapable medium. Van Velde's painting, in contrast, "is bereft, rid if you prefer, of occasion in every shape or form, ideal as well as material" and consequently he is "the first whose hands have not been tied by the certitude that expression is an impossible act". This is the "new" art which, since it is rid of all vestige of form, is not "art" at all as we understand it. ("It seems to have nothing to do with art, in any case, if my memories are correct.") According to B., van Velde has achieved this. Perhaps it can only be achieved in painting.⁵ Whatever the case, Beckett himself by his own admission has never achieved it, and the one thing the dialogues make overwhelming^{ly} clear is that it can never be achieved in a linguistic medium or in any medium which includes words in any function at all.

Here medium is occasion: it cannot be transcended. Beckett's own work, however different from Tal Coat's or Masson's, is like theirs "doomed to become occasion". It is fenced into the "field of the possible" by its moribund means, and however fervently its creator might "dream of an art unresentful of its inseparable indigence and too proud for the farce of giving and receiving", he needs must always turn "back to the mere misery where destitute virtuous mothers may steal bread for their starving brats". Beckett's work is about old endings (Endgame, For to End Yet Again) not new beginnings - and the self-disgust implicit in the image of stealing bread is a powerful and pervasive element. The artistic endeavour has no end. The medium gorges itself on all the grist that comes to its mill, even on the self-disgust: the more the artist supplies the more his medium demands. The demand goes on to infinity; the artist just goes on, for he is under a mysterious obligation to express.

The implications of this predicament are clear enough. For Beckett art is co-extensive, and ultimately co-terminal, with life - if indeed such an existence can justly be called "life". Artistic failure is ontological failure.

The "artistic" terms are absolute in that they predicate and are predicated by a failure of being. Herein lies the problem which faces the Beckett critic, for the conventional critical terminology which he must use makes a pact with the compromise Beckett himself has never brooked. (For him, conventional art is "straining to enlarge the statement of a compromise", p.102), founded as it is upon and acquiescing in a comfortable relativism. Conventional critical terminology pays little heed to ontology in the Beckettian sense : our notions of "success" and "failure" are relative not absolute.

This critical problem is no more new or unique than the creative predicament that calls it into being. Many of B.'s comments and formulations suggest that both creative and critical dilemmas might profitably

be considered in the context of art -/or literary-history. Having supplied a particular theoretical context, let us now attempt to create a literary - historical perspective - though first it might be helpful to recur to the young Beckett for our terminology.

For the Beckett of Three Dialogues "nature" is "a composite of perceiver and perceived" and the history of painting is the history of its attempts to achieve "more authentic, more ample, less exclusive relations between representer and representee" in the face of the inevitable impossibility of achieving unity and identity out of the given duality. "The objections to this dualist view of the creative process are unconvincing". The artist begins with self and other, subject and object, perceiver and perceived, representer and representee, maker and occasion; "all that should concern us is the acute and increasing anxiety of the relationship itself, as though shadowed more and more darkly by a sense of invalidity, of inadequacy, of existence at the expense of all that it excludes, all that it blinds to". The young Beckett had been concerned with the same duality in his monograph on Proust (published in 1931). "But what is attainment?" he asks; and answers: "The identification of the subject with the object of his desire" (p.14). But "no object prolonged in this temporal dimension tolerates possession, meaning by possession total possession, only to be achieved by the complete identification of object and subject" (p.57). He seems to derive his terminology from Baudelaire, quoting his "definition of reality as 'the adequate union of subject and object'" (p.76). Of course in Proust there is an "adequate union" or "complete identification of object and subject" in the flashes of "involuntary memory" : "When the subject is exempt from will and object is exempt from causality (Time and Space taken together). And this human vegetation is purified in the transcendental aperception that can capture the Model, the Idea, the Thing in itself" (p.90). But even at this early stage it is ^{the} Beckettian "sense of failure"

which makes itself most clearly and bitterly felt: "...whatever the object, our thirst for possession is, by definition, insatiable" (p.17).

The history of poetry too, or at least the history of poetry since the Romantic revolution, might be seen (though in a distinctly muted light) as the "history of its attempts to escape" from a "sense of failure" in the face of the seemingly irreparable split between subject and object. But then when one phrases it like this the teleological bias of Beckett's own perspective on the history of painting becomes clear. He is concerned to prepare the way for van Velde in his large-scale formulation, and it is only if we are concerned to prepare the way for Beckett himself as one of the "ends" of literary Romanticism that we shall find ourselves referring to a "sense of failure" in such poets as Blake and Wordsworth. However, I think it is possible - and important - to trace that lurking sense in some of the Romantic and post-Romantic poets of the inevitable impossibility of their enterprise and to see how the sense itself became a large central concern of the poetry, resulting in the creation of poems about not being able to write poems. Such a perspective on the last two hundred years of literary history will be from an explicitly Beckettian standpoint. It is, I feel, a necessary one if we are to approach Beckett's plays with a full awareness of their true nature and aims, for, since these dramas are post-Romantic and post-Modernist, one of the most important contexts for discussion concerns their relations to Romanticism and Modernism.

René Welleck has written of European Romanticism as "the great endeavour to overcome the split between subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the unconscious. This is the central creed of the great Romantic poets in England, Germany and France".⁶ Just so for the Kantian Coleridge the Absolute "must be found in that which is neither subject nor object exclusively, but which is the identity of both".⁷ "We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the

absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in GOD." ⁸ The identity of subject and object which constitutes the Absolute is to be achieved through the faculty of "coadunation", the Imagination : "The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM." ⁹ According to Wellek, "Kant must be considered the first philosopher who clearly and definitely established the peculiarity and autonomy of the aesthetic realm." ¹⁰ But if art (at least in Coleridge's version of Kant) is seen as autonomous and no longer ancillary to or dependent on life - as, say, something which delights people for a few hours and instructs them on how to live better lives - it would seem that, by the implication of Coleridge's definition of the Imagination, the relationship between art and life has been reversed. For if the imagination is seen as the great agent of ontological achievement ("a repetition in the finite mind of...the infinite I AM") the artist will inevitably become dependent on the work of art for his own identity. The life depends on the art and not vice-versa. Art is autonomous, certainly, but the burden it is now being asked to carry is an intolerably heavy one, the burden of the artist's real identity. It is in fact - again by the implication of Coleridge's famous definition - an impossible burden, since for the artist to achieve the Absolute identity which is "the infinite I AM" is for him to become eternal, to become God ("to lose and find all self in GOD" - the paradox of the inexpressible in "lose and find" is inescapable). Art is an unending, progressive process, "a repetition in the finite mind "which is doomed to failure because the artist can never achieve, except perhaps in death, the Absolute self which is God. "To be an artist is to fail..." Beckett's formulation is implicit in Coleridge's definition of the primary Imagination, as indeed is the whole course of European Romanticism of which Beckett is one of the logical conclusions.

It should be clear that this argument has a calculated teleological bias and that any crude application of these ideas to the work of Coleridge or of any of the other romantic poets would be so misleading as to be wrong. Nevertheless we are obviously close to the real reason why Coleridge called "Kubla Khan", a poem which ends with a vision of the god he might be if he could build "in air" the dome of Kubla, ¹¹ "A Fragment". (Whether or not it is a "fragment" is a problem to which we shall need to allude later.) Close too, perhaps, to the real reason why Keats's Hyperion is only a fragment, one abandoned (as if with the intention of being as suggestive as possible in the process!) at the very point that Apollo is "dying into" the life of a god ("Knowledge enormous makes a God of me." ¹²) "That which is creative must create itself" ¹³ wrote Keats in a letter dated 8 October 1818 - written, that is, during the composition of Hyperion. But he too reveals a profound sense of the impossibility of absolute identity when he writes less than three weeks later (whilst still at work on Hyperion) :

A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence: because he has no Identity - he is continually in for [informing?] - and filling some other Body - The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute - the poet has none; no identity - he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures. If then he has no self, and if I am a Poet, where is the Wonder that I should say I would ~~might~~ write no more? Might I not at that very instant [have] been cogitating on the Characters of saturn and Ops? It is a wretched thing to confess; but is a very fact that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature - how can it, when I have no nature? ¹⁴

The ~~might~~/write correction is a resonant detail. One may or may not agree with Christopher Ricks that "Keats's mis-spellings are often indications of how his imagination was working" ¹⁵ (and this particular case is not just a mis-spelling but a correction as well); this instance of mis-spelling seems to me so sharply relevant to its context that it serves to underline the main point of the passage.

For the passage is about the possibility, or rather the seeming impossibility, of the writer's saying right things, things which are right or true to himself, his "identical nature". "If then he has no self, and if I am a Poet, where is the Wonder that I should say I would right no more?" We might remember Molloy:

"Saying is inventing. Wrong, very rightly wrong;" or the search in the sketch Radio II for "the right sign or set of words"; ¹⁶

or Voice in Cascando: " - this time...it's the right one...finish... no more stories...sleep." ¹⁷ Keats's letter is about giving up

writing because of the impossibility of finding through it a right identity - the most Beckettian of subjects. The gods are here too, as if to mock the poet's enterprise: he is "the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures", "cogitating on the Characters of saturn

[who figures significantly in Malone Dies ¹⁸] and Ops". Keats here furnishes the link between Coleridge's definition of the imagination and Beckett's bitter working out of its dark implications.

Coleridge's opposition of the finite "I am" and the "infinite I AM" and Keats's of the chameleon poet and his real Identity are the representatives in strictly ontological terms of the fundamental dualism which underlies and generates most Romantic and post-Romantic art. This dualism is always detectable, though the terms in which it is stated vary. Take for example a romantic of a different nationality and a later generation, Baudelaire - from whom Beckett appears to borrow his critical terms in Proust ("[Proust] understands the meaning of Baudelaire's definition of reality as 'the adequate union of subject and object'," p.76). Baudelaire speaks of art as the creation of "a suggestive magic containing at one and the same time the object and the subject, the external world and the artist himself". ¹⁹

Perhaps the most significant of the inheritors of the Romantic enterprise and certainly the most important from a Beckettian point of view, are the "children" of Baudelaire, the Symboliste poets of the

1870's, 'eighties and 'nineties. Their professed aims seem at once more particular and more universal than those of their predecessors; for Mallarmé poetry is to complement the words of the tribe, thus creating a "supreme" language :

Languages being imperfect in that there are several, the supreme one is lacking: to think being to write without accessories, or whispering but immortal speech being still silent, the diversity, on earth, of idioms stops anyone from uttering the words which, otherwise would find themselves to be at a stroke, in substance truth itself... Verse...philosophically makes up for the shortcomings of languages, as a higher complement.²⁰

Even before Mallarmé, Rimbaud maintains in a famous letter of 1871 that "all speech...being idea, the time of a universal language will come!" The poet is the messiah who brings the universal language, "a true Stealer of Fire": through the experience of all sufferings and all tortures and through a cultivated "derangement of all the senses" "he arrives at the unknown."²¹ He utters the "right" words (which "find themselves to be at a stroke, in substance truth itself"). "Everything, in the world, exists to end up in a book"²² wrote Mallarmé, and until the end of his life he worked on what he called his "Grand Œuvre" or "Livre", the Book in which everything was to end up, including the Absolute Truth of the universe (though, according to Haskell M. Block, "there can be no doubt that Mallarmé's "Grand Œuvre" or "Livre" came to be closely associated with his dramatic aspirations"²³). The important question in the present context is to what extent he acknowledges the inevitable failure of his enterprise. In comparing Mallarmé's poetic aims with Baudelaire's René Wellek moves us recognisably in the direction of Beckett, but his final sentence is problematic :

Art [in Mallarmé] ...can only hint and suggest, not transform as it should in Baudelaire. The "symbol" is only one device to achieve this effect. The so-called "negative" Aesthetics of Mallarmé is thus nothing obscure. It had its psychological basis in a feeling of sterility, impotence, and final silence. He was a perfectionist who proposed something impossible of fulfillment: the book to end all books. "Everything on earth exists to be contained in a book." Like many

poets before him, Mallarmé wants to express the mystery of the universe but feels that this mystery is not only insoluble and immensely dark but also hollow, empty, silent, Nothingness itself... Art searches for the Absolute but despairs of ever reaching it.²⁴

"Something impossible of fulfillment"; "Art searches for the Absolute but despairs of ever reaching it." The suggestion is that Mallarmé fully acknowledges the predestined failure of art. Yet could he not have said, with the young Yeats who sat at his feet during the 'nineties, that "Words alone are certain good", and in a tone which disdained to recognise their ultimate poverty? Poverty is certainly the last word which comes to mind in the face of Mallarmé's own poetic achievement. His way to the "hollow, empty, silent Nothingness" was the quasi-²⁵ Wagnerian one of plenitude, richness and over-richness rather than the Modernist or post-Modernist one of renunciation, deprivation and poverty.

Du souriant fracas originel haï
Entre elles de clartés maîtresses a jailli
Jusque vers un parvis né pour leur simulacre

Trompettes tout haut d'or pâmé sur les vélins,
Le dieu Richard Wagner irradiant un sacre
Mal tu par l'encre même en sanglots sibyllins. ("Hommage", 11.9-14.)

The "sanglots sibyllins" may be taken to suggest the impotence of ink (literary creation or, more generally, visual codification) as opposed to the potency of sound or music, which has its god ("the infinite I AM") in Wagner. Yet the verse itself strives for precisely those musical qualities which it seems to be declaring are beyond it.

Haskell M. Block notes that "just as Mallarmé suggested in his letter to Verlaine that, at best, he could not hope to produce the totality of the "Grand Œuvre", "mais à en montrer un fragment d'exécuté", so in his letter to Fica, there is no prospect of complete realisation of the poet's ideal.²⁶ But a little later Block warns that "the doubts and hesitations of the poet before the magnitude of his task should not suggest that he viewed the dream as mere fantasy... The ambition was

not merely utopian: it was the abiding preoccupation of the poet in the last years of his life...²⁷ Yet "more than one of Mallarmé's closest followers considered his vision of "L'Œuvre" 'par definition irréalisable'."²⁸ Block's last quotation here is from Valéry, but, perhaps significantly, it comes very late; in a letter of March 1942 (just seven years before Beckett's Three Dialogues). The evidence is inconclusive, but what might usefully be suggested is that Mallarmé's refusal (rather than failure) to acknowledge fully the inevitable failure of the poetic enterprise was essentially a strategy which he adopted to enable himself to continue creating.

Gabriel Josipovici has maintained that Rimbaud was the only poet in the nineteenth century²⁹ who "was fully aware of the implications of the Romantic endeavour and was also prepared to accept and overcome them". (my emphasis). The failure of the ideal of a universal language, Josipovici continues,

can be traced through the poems themselves, and it forms the explicit subject-matter of Une saison en enfer. And, indeed, how could Rimbaud succeed? What he desires is not communication but communion, the direct and total contact of one person with another through a language so charged that it will act without needing to pass by way of the interpreting mind at all; in other words a language that is not conventional but natural. But, as we have seen, such a wish can never be more than a Utopian dream, since to give words the meanings I want them to have regardless of their dictionary definitions is tantamount to abolishing language altogether. When Rimbaud recognised this, with admirable logic he gave up writing altogether.³⁰

Rimbaud's silence is at the threshold of Modernism, which can thus be seen as the full acknowledgement of the failure implicit in the Romantic enterprise. Creative failure, or more precisely the failure of the creative quest or endeavour or mission, is one of the great subjects of literary Modernism. It is, of course, by no means a new subject. We have been concerned chiefly with poetry (for the purposes of this particular area of literary theory), but it was prose, with its capacity to mimic pedantry and leadenfootedness, which most

aptly manifested the consciousness of failure in pre-Modernist literature. Hugh Kenner has written of the last novel of Flaubert (the unfinished Bouvard et Pécuchet), the first of the "stoic comedians" and a writer who was acknowledged as a precursor by Pound, Eliot, Joyce, Kafka and Mann - acknowledged precisely because his prose aspired to the "poetic" virtues :

The task he had set himself was nothing less than to achieve by labour effects comparable to those of appalling incompetence:... the incompetence, in short, of fiction itself, which is endlessly arranging things. He will use fiction itself to vanquish fiction; he will arrange, and manoeuvre, and contrive, to such bland effect that no one will ever afterward be quite sure where contrivance began and serendipity left off. He will use with cunning every device of the merely facile novelist; and the result will be such a compendium of unreality that it will seem real.³¹

The continuity is evident if we place by the side of this account of the later Flaubert in a Modernist perspective Josipovici's definition of literary Modernism as

a crisis of confidence in the authority of the author or creator. Where the Romantic poet had been convinced of the truth and value of what he had to say, his modern counterpart could only see the absurdity of such a posture. Prufrock, the hero of Eliot's poem of 1914, though not himself a poet, speaks...for his creator:...Prufrock is no John the Baptist, and no Lazarus either, 'come from the dead, come back to tell you all'. There is nothing special about Prufrock, or about Eliot either, to justify their utterances - so how should they presume? Presume to act, presume to write, presume to tell other people about the world or how to live their lives. And we recall other writers caught in the same dilemma. Proust filled, from childhood, with the urge to write, and yet incapable of ever getting down to work because he cannot conceive of an adequate subject about which to write. Kafka, pressed by his father and his whole environment to justify his writing or take a job that will allow him to make his mark in the world, and incapable of doing either. The need to write and the meaninglessness of all writing is the paradoxical law under which the modern artist seems to operate.³²

With the last sentence we are clearly in the Beckett world. In the well-known formulation in Three Dialogues, however, the "need to write", which in a review of 1938 was identified by Beckett as "the absolute predicament of particular human identity",³³ has become frighteningly impersonal, an "obligation" - and mysterious: "Why is he obliged to paint?" "I don't

know." The "paradoxical law under which the modern artist seems to operate" issues in "the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express". The paradoxical law, Josipovici continues, is that

out of which he [the modern artist] creates his greatest work. For when Proust at last discovers his true subject matter, that subject-matter is nothing less than the exploration of the impossibility of finding any subject-matter; and Kafka's fictions become the long patient descriptions of his own failures. But these fictions engage us...³⁴

These claims have been made, and made repeatedly, for Beckett's own work, and yet, placed by the side of the comments on Bram van Velde in the Three Dialogues they serve only to suggest just how problematic is the relation of Beckett's work to Modernist art. Josipovici's description of the way writers like Proust and Kafka resolve the "paradoxical law" which governs their lives and thereby enable themselves to write might be taken at first glance as a less formidable restatement of the Beckettian formulation about van Velde's "expression" ("that there is nothing to express" etc). However, Beckett claims something more for van Velde : not only does van Velde confront the impossibility of the creative act, he also - and this is the crucial point - disdains to make that confrontation a new occasion of expression. As Josipovici indicates, Proust and Kafka do precisely this: they succeed by making failure their subject, thus resolving the paradox of creativity. Beckett, on the other hand, insists on van Velde's "fidelity to failure", his honesty with himself. "But let us," B. suggests to D., "for once, be foolish enough not to turn tail. All have turned wisely tail, before the ultimate penury..." This is an issue which concerns what Beckett spoke of in his review of Denis Devlin's Intercessions as "the probity with which the creative act has carried itself out".³⁵ In the light of the remarks about van Velde,

Modernism (as described by Josipovici) must be seen to break its "fidelity to failure" by making artistic capital out of creative poverty. Josipovici describes Proust and Kafka as pursuing their subjects and then making great art by writing about the failed pursuit. But Beckett has already anticipated that answer: "It is obvious that for the artist obsessed with his expressive vocation, anything and everything is doomed to become occasion, including, as is apparently the case with Masson, the pursuit of occasion, and the every man his own wife experiments of the spiritual Kandinsky. No painting is more replete than Mondrian's." Repletion and narcissism are, from the Beckettian standpoint, the conditions of a dishonest art, an inauthentic creativity.

The split with Modernism which is implicit in Beckett's insistence on the artist's paradoxical "fidelity to failure" is most clearly manifested in his hostile attitude, in a review of 1934, towards Rilke. The disdainful gelid flourish which opens the review of J. B. Leishman's translations of Rilke is typical of the young "critical" Beckett :

Malte Laurids Brigge was a kind of deficient Edmond Teste, deficient in his commerce with Svevo's Zeno and Gide's Lafcadio, a Teste who had not 'tué la marionette', a Teste obliged to rise, for the purpose of breathing, at frequent intervals to the surface of his 'variation'. So one feels it to be with Rilke, always popping up for the gulp of disgust that will rehabilitate the Ichgott, recruit him for the privacies of that divinity - until the next time.³⁶

As I understand it, this is a restatement, though an allusive, indirect and therefore slightly puzzling one, of the assertion in Proust : "The only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent. The artist is active, but negatively, shrinking from the nullity of extracircumferential phenomena, drawn in to the core of the eddy." (pp.65-6. The Devlin review likewise insists on the isolation of poetry and poets from "social reality". It begins: "With himself on behalf of himself. With his selves on behalf of his selves. Tour d'ébène."³⁷) Rilke's disgust is with "these human vegetables" (Beckett quotes from Leishman's translation : "I move among these human vegetables...But my

horizon's full of fantasy". This, he says, is "the crassest of antitheses."³⁸⁾ The "gulp of disgust" rehabilitates the Ichgott because, according to Beckett, "that prime article of the Rilkean faith...provides for the interchangeability of Rilke and God."³⁹ For Beckett this article of Rilkean faith is in bad faith. We can see why if we consider a poem about Rilke and the creator-God Orpheus. I quote in full the third poem from the first part of Die Sonette an Orpheus :

Ein Gott vermags. Wie aber, sag mir, soll
ein Mann ihm folgen durch die schmale Leier?
Sein Sinn ist Zwiespalt. An der Kreuzung zweier
Herzwege steht kein Tempel für Apoll.

Gesang, wie du ihn lehrst, ist nicht Begehr,
nicht Werbung um ein endlich noch Erreichtes;
Gesang ist Dasein. Für den Gott ein Leichtes.
Wann aber sind wir? Und wann wendet er

an unser Sein die Erde und die Sterne?
Dies ist nicht, Jüngling, dass du liebst, wenn auch
die Stimme dann den Mund dir aufstösst, - lerne

vergessen, dass du aufsangst. Das verrint.
In Wahrheit singen, ist ein andrer Hauch.
Ein Hauch um nichts. Ein Wehn im Gott. Ein Wind.

J.B. Leishman's commentary on the poem runs as follows:

How can man, in whose nature there is such a deep division and opposition between duty and inclination, desire and capability, ideal and actual, follow the divine example of Orpheus ['Ein Gott vermags'], and achieve complete unity between himself and the world, between what he might be and what he is?

The song of Orpheus (what Rilke would call real poetry) is something far more than self-expression, or wish-fulfillment, or the communication of a unique sensibility. Song is existence: that is to say, it is not merely about some reality, what the poet felt about it, how it affected him, as though he and his moods were the most important things in the world; it is some reality: the poet has succeeded in completely renouncing, completely suppressing, his own personality, wie er geht und steht, in order to become a mere voice, a mere mouth - but 'a mouth for Nature', for the dumb things that can only speak through us and for the spirit that 'bloweth where it listeth'.⁴⁰

This is a poem about the impossibility of uniting subject and object, the creator and Nature. As such it is in itself an "art of failure" in that "what Rilke would call real poetry" is a poetry emptied of the "occasion" of expression, that is, "the common anxiety to express as much as possible,

or as truly as possible, or as finely as possible, to the best of one's ability" (P3D, p.120). This involves far more than merely the achievement of a Joycean or even Eliotic artistic impersonality (Leishman's commentary cannot help but evoke these presences). It means the total absence of the "artistic" vehicle or medium; not just the words but the poet himself - and yet (here is the paradox) he is also "there", united with the great creating Nature which exists through him and in him. He is a vessel ("a mouth for Nature") but not a vessel - because no longer separate from Nature; he is "expressive" but without the occasion of expression: "Ein Hauch um nichts". In him (and in Nature for they are now One) Art and Existence are no longer at odds: "Gesang ist Dasein." All this "Ein Gott vermags", but the poet cannot. He cannot achieve the impossible paradoxical Creation therefore he cannot fully exist: "Wann aber sind wir?" And he infects his objects with his own instability: "Und wann wendet er [the god] an unser Sein die Erde und die Sterne?" Human existence is doomed to imperfection: "An der Kreuzung zweier / Herzwege steht kein Tempel für Apoll". Thus that which is creative (to echo Keats) can never fully create itself - which would also mean to lose itself. Only the god Orpheus can "In Wahrheit singen". The way in which Leishman concludes his commentary is interesting :

This ideal seemed much less impossible to Rilke than it would to most of us; nevertheless, we may find in his letters a record of the terrible moods of depression and emptiness, isolation and unreality, that followed his great periods of illumination and self-transcendence - moods when his spirit was flung back upon the unwilling dross that checked its flight!⁴¹

It is perhaps significant that Leishman should feel that the point needs emphasis in the light of this particular poem. He tells us that Rilke suffered "terrible moods of depression and emptiness, isolation and unreality", yet in a poem in which, if anywhere , we should expect to find such feelings, a poem which contemplates the inevitable failure of poetry as we know it, these "terrible moods" are conspicuous only by

their absence. We need to remind ourselves that the exquisitely-turned second sentence of the poem is not a statement but a question: "Wie aber, sag mir, soll/ein Mann ihm folgen durch die schmale Leier?" How indeed - but the question carries no real weight as a question. "Ein Gott vermags", he writes: "Für den Gott ein Leichtes". Easy, certainly, for the Ichgott poet who seems too often interchangeable with his ideal creator Orpheus and too often blissfully unaware of his own interchangeability. We are conscious, and so is he, of his poem as an achieved creation and therefore - "Gesang ist Dasein" - as an achieved existence, the ultimate paradox. Yet it is not the Orphean "Hauch um nichts" of "real singing": it is still only an achievement of expression - and one which does not care to admit its failure to transcend "the plane of the feasible" and become the ideal "nothingness", inexpressive and inexpressible, which is the "Tempel für Apoll". Rilke does not regard words as "unwilling dross"; he is only too willing to gather them and fashion out of them the monument more lasting than brass :

An der Kreuzung zweier
Herzwege steht kein Tempel für Apoll.

But the temple of the medium, words, indubitably stands. The lines are beautiful, statuesque and self-regarding. "Gesang" is never anxious about its "Dasein". From the Beckettian point of view, the verse is both replete and narcissistic.

The Rilke sonnet presents the "inauthenticity" implicit in Modernism in a particularly acute form. Out of failure "he creates his greatest work"; his "fidelity to failure" is only apparent: the poem is a "success" in conventional relativist terms and - this is the important point - it seems content with success on those terms. But poetry has a problem here, a problem which is perhaps bigger than that of prose or drama, for it is the most obviously and inescapably formal of all literary genres, and the composition of a poem in a particular form cannot help but imply an expressive achievement. A sonnet for example - since we have been considering a poem of that type - is a crafted, finished aesthetic object

with fourteen lines and one of a variety of rhyme schemes. (Die Sonette an Orpheus are metrically varied.) A great part of our appreciation of a sonnet, or indeed of any poem in a strict verse form, consists of our admiration of the poet's skill in meeting the requirements of his chosen form or using the formal limitations to expressive ends. There is indeed a strong sense of 'the "sculpture" of rhyme'. Our attitude changes significantly, if only slightly, when "Dejection : A Letter" becomes "Dejection : An Ode"; or when "Kubla Khan", a fragment, becomes "Kubla Khan, A Fragment".⁴² "Dejection : An Ode" must imply a different attitude by Coleridge towards his own creative failure than "Dejection : A Letter" : Dejection has been safely indemnified, returned (as Beckett might say) safe and sound to the bosom of Saint Luke and "Art".

But if verse manifests the problem of "fidelity to failure" in Modernist literature in its acutest form, the difference between verse and prose is only one of degree. Prose too is obviously committed to expression; we are continually reminded of that by modern novelists who aspire to write - and demand to be read - like poets. This does not mean that only modern novelists demand to be read as if their prose were poetry but that the post-Flaubertian novelist (Joyce is the obvious example) composes with a self-conscious scrupulosity which tends, and is often meant, to make itself felt in the finished product: we are always conscious of the manipulative creator with his "poetic" ideals of precision, economy and local linguistic effect. When Beckett discusses Proust he places him in a poetic rather than a novelistic context. His terms ("subject" and "object") are Baudelairean, and Proust, though related in passing to Dostoyevski, is seen as the heir of Baudelaire and the Symbolistes rather than of Chateaubriand and Amiel (whom, according to Beckett, he quotes as "his spiritual ancestors", p.82) or - horribile dictu - the "realist" novelists:

And he understands the meaning of Baudelaire's definition of reality as 'the adequate union of subject and object', and more clearly than ever the grotesque fallacy of a

realistic art - 'the miserable statement of a line and surface', and the penny-a-line vulgarity of a literature of notations. (p.76)

But the tendency of the modern novel towards the condition and aspirations of poetry only compounds the problem. How can an inherently expressive medium, whether in poetry or prose, maintain a "fidelity to failure"?

To suggest that the great Modernist writers were not aware of the problems we have been discussing would be to do them a grave disservice. What is the self-consciousness which is a pervasive feature of their work if not an implicit recognition that the problems which surround creativity in the modern world are not susceptible to easy solutions? One need only think of Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus (1947), the last achievement (save perhaps for the late Cantos of Pound) of the great Modernist generation and a work written at the same time that Beckett was finding creative release in the French prose of the novel trilogy. Mann's novel, a seeming non plus ultra of artistic self-consciousness, is indeed about the impossibility of valid expression. (By using a relevant quotation from the book as my epigraph I have tried to hint at what seem to me to be interesting affinities between parts of Doktor Faustus and Beckett's Three Dialogues.)

Yet Doktor Faustus is also about one man's "breakthrough", even though the price that has to be paid is an awful one. This is Rilke's defence: he believed himself to have succeeded; his was not, in his own eyes, an "art of failure". In the light of ultimate success, even the initial failures are thrown into meaningful relief. The pattern in the carpet is perceived in toto at last. So it is with Proust. Roger Shattuck describes the structural peripeteia of the great book thus :

We watch love and friendship, social success and even art disintegrate as he reaches them. Only at the very end does the reader follow Marcel in performing a great double take on what has happened. No major new element enters the action. Chance alone intervenes in the humble form of paving stones and spoons and water pipes. Yet everything Marcel has gone through has slowly and imperceptibly

shifted the odds in his favour until chance has the force of fate. He lives surrounded by signs and secrets. Suddenly Qui perd gagne : loser takes all. By an act of recognition which incorporates rather than rejects lived experience, Marcel sees the past anew as his own, as himself. It is the moment at which he becomes the Narrator, thus finding the vocation which he presumed totally lost.⁴³

The Proustian peripeteia, like Adrian Leverkühn's commitment to the Devil, is predicated by the belief that it is only through artistic creativity that life and "lived experience" gain meaning and purpose. Indeed, this is what constitutes Marcel's "act of recognition". The point is not that the world is well lost for art, but that the world only makes sense when it is approached by way of artistic creation. This self-conscious belief, ambiguous or qualified by irony though it is in some cases, in the efficacy of art, is one which Beckett cannot share. Perhaps alone amongst the great Modernists, his attitude is one of revulsion and sustained abhorrence, feelings which are only intensified by the fact that creativity is so necessary to him and his characters. This acute scepticism finds expression in a literature of self-annihilation, and it is this which constitutes Beckett's own attempt to maintain a "fidelity to failure" in an inherently expressive medium. His "art of failure" is, therefore, also an art of paradox.

Of course Beckett is not the only writer for whom critical claims of this order have been made. Nathan A. Scott sees him as only "the most impressive representative" of a "radical French contemporary tradition". It is, argues Scott, a

despair of "the literary game" that constitutes what is undoubtedly the basic premise of many of those writers of the present time in France who, in the years since the close of the Second World War, have emerged into prominence as the chief creators of what Claude Mauriac calls the new alittérature...In the theatre of Ionesco it is drama itself that is under attack; in the fiction of Michel Butor and Nathalie Sarraute the novel itself is something that, in effect, we are asked to regard as questionable and problematic; and their contemporaries are, most of them, "anti-dramatists" and "anti-novelists".⁴⁴

Mauriac, mentioned here by Scott and later quoted by him, regards Beckett

as "an exemplary alittérateur", creator of "a literature that, by negating all literature, annihilates itself in the catastrophe it has created". And yet the terms of his appraisal are disappointingly familiar :

One cannot deny, at any rate, the extraordinary impression, I dare not say of enrichment, since it concerns awareness of an absolute poverty, that Samuel Beckett creates. Poverty that is our only wealth. Inexhaustible, fascinating poverty.⁴⁵

One recalls Beckett's use of the same metaphor in the dialogue on van Velde: "But let us, for once, be foolish enough not to turn tail. All have turned wisely tail before the ultimate penury, back to the mere misery where destitute virtuous mothers may steal bread for their starving brats." The paradox in Mauriac's last two sentences emerges from his awareness of the problems presented to criticism by this kind of literature ("I dare not say..."), and yet it is plain that he too, having established a sound theoretical base with the concept of alittérature, in the last resort "turns wisely tail" and restores his author "safe and sound to the bosom of Saint Luke".

The alittérature of the French avant-garde, as exemplified by the nouveau roman, is (as this tag indicates) underwritten by the belief in the possibility of a "new literature". "In this construction of future novels", writes Alain Robbe-Grillet (a representative figure), "gestures and objects will be there, before they are something... We thought we had come to terms with the world around us by giving it a meaning, and the whole art of the novel, in particular, seemed dedicated to this task. But that was only an illusory simplification, and far from becoming clearer and nearer, all that was happening was that the world was gradually losing all its life in the process. Since its reality consists above all in its presence, what we have to do now, then, is to build a literature which takes this into account."⁴⁶ Presence is no longer to be violated by the imposed structures and systems of traditional fiction - plot, character, - symbolism and so forth. We should hardly expect the author of

Three Dialogues, in which something approaching a philosophical Idealism is everywhere apparent (subject and object are both "unstable terms of relation"), to assent to these ideas. Again it is a shared metaphor which reveals most clearly the distinction between the avant-garde and Beckett. Robbe-Grillet, describing "the poverty of the old myths of depth", writes:

We know that all fiction used to be based on them, and on them alone. The role of the writer traditionally consisted in burrowing down into Nature, in excavating it, in order to reach its most intimate strata and finally bring to the light some minute part of a disturbing secret. The writer descended into the chasm of human passions and sent up to the apparently tranquil world (that of the surface) victorious messages describing the mysteries he had touched with his fingers. And the sacred vertigo which then overwhelmed the reader, far from causing him any distress or nausea, on the contrary reassured him about his powers of domination over the world. There were abysses, it was true, but thanks to these valiant speleologists their depths could be sounded.⁴⁷

Beckett, who has indeed called himself an "onto-speleologist", has always subscribed to this notion of the "writer's traditional role", in both his criticism and his creative work. In Proust he shuns "the miserable statement of a line and surface" and states that "the only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent", and he suggests that "the heart of the cauliflower or the ideal core of the onion would represent a more appropriate tribute to the labours of poetical excavation than the crown of the bay" (p.29). The artist is conceived of as a caterpillar or a burrowing animal, an unprepossessing creature who contrives to tunnel, leaving behind him "his warren of modes and attitudes" (p.124). He is a worm called Worm or an ant making for its hole with an egg. Beckett told the actress Elizabeth Bergner that he was "not looking for answers: I am only trying to dig a little deeper".⁴⁸ And he spoke to Lawrence E. Harvey "of the attempt to find [the] lost self in images of getting down, getting below the surface, concentrating, listening, getting your ear down so you can hear the infinitesimal murmur. There is a gray struggle, a groping in the dark for a shadow".⁴⁹ The image of the artist as a "fodient" (burrowing) creature is indeed obsessive. It finds its most crudely powerful expression in Radio II, a sketch written "circa 1960"

(but first published only in 1976 when it was broadcast, as part of the BBC celebrations for the author's 70th birthday, under the punning title Rough for Radio) in which a creature called Fox (Vox?) tunnels for his creative - ontological goal: "age upon age, up again, down again, little lichens of my little span, living dead in the stones,

and there took to the tunnels(...) Oceans too, that too, no denying, I drew near down the tunnels, blue above, blue ahead, that for sure, and there too, no further, ways end, all ends and farewell, farewell and fall, farewell seasons, till I fare again" (EAO, p.99).

The metaphor is laid bare for the fiction it is in The Unnamable :

"Are there other pits, deeper down? To which one accedes by mine [a pun?] ? Stupid obsession with depth."⁵⁰ But is there an apter alternative, a "truer" image?

As the differing attitudes of Beckett and Robbe-Grillet towards an identical metaphorical conception of the artistic activity indicate, Beckett's art differs radically from that of the writers of the French avant-garde in its relation to the traditional modes and forms of literature. In fact there is here what is tantamount to a forking of the ways: whilst the avant-garde responds to the terminal predicament of Modernism by attempting to escape the pervasive self-consciousness of Modernist literature altogether, Beckett keeps solitary faith with his Modernist masters by intensifying that self-consciousness to a pitch whereby the work can only end by cancelling itself out.

In an interview with Israel Shenker Beckett made an important distinction between his own art and that of perhaps the greatest modern exploiter of failure, Franz Kafka :

You notice how Kafka's form is classic, it goes on like a steamroller - almost serene. It seems to be threatened the whole time - but the consternation is in the form. In my work there is consternation behind the form, not in the form.⁵¹

Whatever the difference, the form is still there - otherwise there can be no consternation behind it. But what is a "consternation behind the form"? Some of the finest observations relating to the matter were made by

Donald Davie in a review of the radio-play All That Fall⁵² when it first appeared in 1958 :

Beckett - how absurd to start this way, yet this is never said - Beckett is a comic writer. He has yet to write a book that is not a funny book :

Mrs Rooney: ...It's like the sparrows, than many of which we are of more value, they weren't sparrows at all.

Mr Rooney: Than many of which...You exaggerate, Maddy [ATF, p.38] .

What Mrs Rooney exaggerates isn't in the first place man's dignity (his price in terms of sparrows), but the dignity of his language. By the meticulous correctness of her syntax ('than many of which') she achieves an elegance so conscious of itself that it becomes absurd, a parody of all stylistic elegance whatever, insinuating the suspicion that all the elegances of language, which seem so superbly to articulate experience, in fact articulate nothing but themselves.⁵³

After comparing Beckett's use of parody with Joyce's ("one could be forgiven for thinking that Beckett has been reading Mr Kenner on Joyce's use of parody"⁵⁴), Davie continues :

But Mrs Rooney differs from both Mrs Bloom and Mr Dedalus in knowing that the [linguistic] formulae cannot be trusted even though she uses them. In other words she speaks by formula, but she does not live and feel by formula - or she strives not to, though her language continually traps her into it. From this point of view there is more hope for her, and it may be quite true that the hope will indeed be consumed when her language is as dead as 'our own poor dear Gaelic', that is to say, without the sort of zombie life it now has, which suffices to thwart her feelings while good for nothing else. 'There is that to be said.'

Here as elsewhere Beckett stakes new ground away from Joyce by applying Joycean perceptions of parody to a different dimension of language. Like Mrs Rooney he uses 'none but the simplest words', and accordingly his quarry is not Joyce's, the word, but the sentence, not in the first place vocabulary but syntax. It is syntax, rather than the word in isolation, which parodies itself. Though language may betray the speaker in a Joycean pun ('Nip some young doom in the bud'), more often for Beckett it does so by syntactical over-elegance. This is what happens to Maddy with her 'than many of which', as here to her husband:

Mrs Rooney: There is nothing to be done for those people!

Mr Rooney : For which is there? (Pause.) That does not sound right somehow [ATF, p.37] .

Or else there is a thoroughly dramatic and Wildean reversal of the expected, as in Maddy's 'There is that to be said', or in 'I saved his life once. (Pause.) I have not forgotten it' [ATF, p.11] .⁵⁵

Davie's comparison of Joyce's parody with Beckett's is an illuminating one. If Joyce's parodic "quarry" is vocabulary, then this suggests that what he is interested in is the relationship of word to thing on an individual level. If several words are constellated round a particular thing, the questions will be : For what reason does this or that character use that particular word to refer to this thing? What is there about the character? To what philosophical or popular belief, or system of belief, does he or she subscribe such that he or she uses that word rather than another? Or to what social group does the character belong? As Davie says, "Joyce was forced to use parody as his central literary device because his subject dictated it."⁵⁶ He parodies the manners and language of particular people and of particular kinds of dead or dying language - Davie's examples are Simon Dedalus's "eighteenth century Ciceronianism" and Molly Bloom's "nineteenth century Romanticism". But Joyce's parodies are always underwritten by an exhilarating belief in language itself as being potentially alive. As Beckett himself remarked to Harvey: "Joyce believed in words. All you had to do was rearrange them and they would express what you wanted."⁵⁷ However Beckett's own parodic quarry is, as Davie rightly observes, not vocabulary but syntax, that is, the structures which are made with language and those which are, indeed, predicated by language. Such structures are universal; they are intrinsic to every language. In a sense, a language is its syntactical and grammatical structures, since it would be useless without them; useless that is, in ordering and organising ourselves and the outside world, and in mediating between the two. Thus when Beckett parodies the syntax of a language, he is initiating a consternation behind not just the "forms" of a particular person, or group, or even of a particular country, but of language itself, hence (in Davie's words) "insinuating the suspicion that all the elegances of language, which seem so superbly to articulate experience, in fact articulate nothing but themselves".

In the prose of the late 'forties (translated into English in the early 'fifties) the "consternation behind the form" finds its most obvious local manifestations, in the "variable but ceaseless alternation between statement and negation" which "remains the characteristic feature of the style".⁵⁸ Negation is most potent at the ends of the works :

I don't know why I told this story. I could just as well have told another.⁵⁹

All I say cancels out, I'll have said nothing.⁶⁰

The memory came faint and cold of the story I might have told, a story in the likeness of my life.⁶¹

Perhaps the most obvious example is the closure of the vicious circle of fiction across the span of the second part of Molloy :

It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows...It was not midnight. It was not raining.⁶²

When we have read the last sentences of Molloy we realise that what the novel has given us is two variations on a theme (aptly enough the "quest" theme) which, because the creator's position is no more stable than that of the created's, might be varied to infinity: the two sections float like specks in a void, unfixed and entirely random. "Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn't fill it."⁶³ The faster its fictions proliferate, the more elusive the absolute truth of being seems. "And that is why the dead end of Beckett is so fecund a beginning. It is fecund even in Beckett's own hands; he has time after time rendered another book on his own premises impossible, and then written another book."⁶⁴ Hugh Kenner sees the situation clearly, as usual, but his optimism seems sentimental by the side of Beckett's own continuing horror and bitterness at the impossibility of fixing being in words. There can be no stable authentic end (or object) because there is no stable authentic beginning (or subject): "All I know is what the words know, and the dead things, and that makes a handsome little sum, with a beginning, a middle and an end as in the well-built phrase and the long

sonata of the dead. And truly it little matters what I say, this or that or any other thing." The bitterness of the irony (and the self-parody) bears out what Lawrence Harvey reports of Beckett : "He admitted to using words where words are illegitimate."⁶⁵ The continually self-negating, shifting textures of his most characteristic prose underline that a concern with being is a formal concern, and that a consternation behind the existence of the creator means a consternation behind the form of his art.

"I'm in words, made of words"⁶⁶ declares the narrator of The Unnamable, Beckett "man" in extremis. And it is quite literally true. All characters in all books are, before they are anything else, in words and made of words. Beckett has been conscious of that ever since he started to write, and by 1946 - the beginning of the great prose period - he had discovered a fictional mode which, if it was no more adequate in the end than any other, at least served to accommodate a forceful consternation at its own impotence. A book can only be words on pages between covers, "a handsome little sum, with a beginning, a middle and an end as in the well-built phrase". A novel violates by exclusion: that is its nature. All it can produce are the "handsome little sums" the narrator of The Unnamable calls "vice-existers": Molloy, Moran, Malone, Macmann, Mahood, Worm; "an image, like any other" (P2R, p.47). All in words and made of words, none of them are really there.

However, the nature of theatre is exactly the opposite. "The medium of drama", wrote Ezra Pound, "is not words but persons moving about on a stage using words."⁶⁷ Alain Robbe-Grillet revealed a characteristic awareness of the differences between novel and theatre in an early essay called "Samuel Beckett, or 'Presence' in the Theatre" :

The condition of man, says Heidegger, is to be there. The theatre probably re-produces this situation more naturally than any of the other ways of representing reality. The essential thing about a character in a play is that he is "on the scene": there.

To see Samuel Beckett face this challenge was bound to be of exceptional interest: at last we should actually see Beckett's man, Man himself. For though Beckett the novelist threw himself more and more relentlessly into the search, our chances of actually apprehending the man of the novels grew more remote with every page...

All the creatures that have passed before us were only there to deceive us: they occupied the sentences of the novel in the place of that elusive being who always refuses to appear, the man who cannot enter into his own existence, the man who can never succeed in being there.

But now we are in the theatre.⁶⁸

We are indeed, but this, the medium of presence, presents a creative problem to the artist who feels himself to be an "unstable term" concerned with the "absolute predicament of particular human identity", for this predicament is one of partial or imperfect presence, a kind of absence. "During conversations in 1961, and 1962", reports Lawrence E Harvey, "Beckett frequently expressed himself on his activity as a writer and its relation to his existence as a human being."

An image Beckett used repeatedly to express his sense of the unreality of life on the surface was "existence by proxy". Very often one is unable to take a single step without feeling that someone else is taking the step. Going through the motions, "being absent", are common experiences. This notion led him to describe a schizophrenic in a London mental institution where, like Murphy, he worked for a time. The patient seemed like a lump of meat. There was no one there. He was absent. On another occasion he made an association between this feeling and the idealist philosophy of Berkeley. Perhaps it was an Irish thing, basically a skepticism before nature as given, complicated by a skepticism about the perceiving subject as well. Along with this sense of existence by proxy goes "an unconquerable intuition that being is so unlike what one is standing up", an "intuition of a presence, embryonic, undeveloped, of a self that might have been but never got born, an être manqué".⁶⁹

This is, to use a phrase of R.D. Laing's, "life, without feeling alive".⁷⁰

Laing cites Beckett and quotes from Waiting for Godot in The Divided Self.

His description of "primary ontological insecurity" is the best account

I have found of the Beckettian creative - ontological situation:

"Under usual circumstances", writes Laing,

the physical birth of a new living organism into the world inaugurates rapidly ongoing processes whereby within an amazingly short time the infant feels real and alive and has a sense of being an entity, with continuity in time and a location in space. In short, physical birth and biological aliveness are followed by the baby becoming existentially born as real and alive. Usually this development is taken for granted and affords the certainty upon which all other certainties depend.⁷¹

A powerful recurrent image in Beckett's own work indicates that it is precisely this "existential birth" which cannot be taken for granted. He speaks to Harvey of "a presence, embryonic, undeveloped, of a self that might have been but never got born, an être manqué", remarking that "the writer is like a foetus trying to do gymnastics".⁷² (in order to be born?). Buried in the "Addenda" to Watt is the phrase "never been properly born"⁷³. In August 1976, Hildegard Schmahl, the actress who was creating the character of May in the German version of Footfalls (Tritte) asked Beckett how the character is to be understood. Walter D. Asmus reports :

Only hesitantly does Beckett take up this challenge to give more detailed information about the play. In the thirties, he says, C. G. Jung, the psychologist, once gave a lecture in London and told of a female patient who was being treated by him. Jung said he wasn't able to help this patient and for this, according to Beckett, he gave an astonishing explanation. This girl wasn't living. She existed but didn't actually live. According to Beckett, this story had impressed him very much at the time.⁷⁴

The experience did indeed leave a deep impression, deep enough for him to reproduce it in all its detail, though with a fine pervasive irony, in All That Fall (1957). Mrs. Rooney quotes from a lecture she had attended "by one of those new mind doctors" (ATF, p.36), in which he had spoken ("as if he had had a revelation") about a little girl patient: "The trouble with her was she had never been really born?" (ATF, p.37) Even before this, the image emerges at the climax of Godot: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more,"⁷⁵ "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth" (WFG, p.90).

The "lingeringly" introduced by Vladimir into Pozzo's initial formulation brings this image decisively within the orbit of the "imperfect birth" idea (for this is a life-long process). It is virtually a leitmotiv in Malone Dies, in which the protagonist is "far already from the world that parts at last its labia and lets me go".⁷⁶ "Yes," he affirms, "an old foetus, that's what I am now, hoar and impotent, mother is done for, I've rotted her, she'll drop me with the help of gangrene, perhaps papa is at the party too, I'll land head-foremost mewling in the charnel-house, not that I'll mewl, not worth it."⁷⁷ "The feet are clear already, of the great cunt of existence."⁷⁸

The imperfect birth is Beckett's most potent metaphor for the existential condition described by Laing:

The individual in the ordinary circumstances of living may feel more unreal than real; in a literal sense, more dead than alive; precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question. He may lack the experience of his own temporal continuity. He may not possess an over-riding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness. He may feel more insubstantial than substantial, and unable to assume that the stuff he is made of is genuine, good, valuable. And he may feel his self as partially divorced from his body.⁷⁹

In such a situation creativity is an ontological imperative :

If the individual cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy, and identity of himself and others for granted, then he has to become absorbed in contriving ways of trying to be real, of keeping himself or others alive, of preserving his identity, in efforts, as he will often put it, to prevent himself losing his self. What are to most people everyday happenings, which are hardly noticed because they have no special significance, may become deeply significant in so far as they either contribute to the sustenance of the individual's being or threaten him with non-being... External events no longer affect him in the same way as they do others: it is not that they affect him less: on the contrary, frequently they affect him more.⁸⁰

Of all Beckett's plays Endgame in particular is full of examples of apparent trivia being enlisted, often with comic results, for the creative - ontological purposes of the "contrivance", the game :

"A Flea! This is awful! What a day!" (E, p.27) For here existence, such as it is, depends entirely upon the game: existence is creativity.

It is this situation which Beckett the dramatist is confronted with: the representation of "existence by proxy" or être manqué in the very medium of être, of presence. His expressive response to the problem will necessarily be paradoxical, since it involves not the expression of self but some kind of annihilation of self. This study is concerned with Beckett's creative response to this problem of discreation.

Chapter One: WAITING FOR GODOT

French version: written 9 October 1948 - 29 January 1949; first performed 5 January 1953.

English version: translated 1954; first performed 3 August 1955.¹

"Beckett is unhappy", reported Charles Marowitz in 1962, "with how he has been treated by producers in the past."² "Isn't this a matter of each producer's interpretation?" asked Marowitz. "Yes", replied Beckett, "but within the limits of a specified text the producer has plenty of scope for interpretation. But in a lot of cases, producers go directly contrary to what is intended."³ The complaint is one that might be made by any widely-produced playwright. What is important in this case is that Beckett has on a number of occasions taken the opportunity to illustrate clearly and powerfully (though without denying the "scope" for other interpretations of which he spoke to Marowitz) his own ideas of how his plays should be staged. To date one of the best documented of his own productions has been the German language production of Waiting for Godot (Warten auf Godot) which he directed at the Schiller Theater, Berlin in 1975, and it is with a consideration of the directorial approach exemplified by this production that I want to begin. It is to be hoped that such a critical approach will enable us to view this most famous and most written-about Beckett play in a fresh light. For the documentation of the 1975 Berlin Godot means that we can see the later Beckett thinking about (and perhaps even rethinking) the earlier Beckett. The play of 1949 is, as it were, refracted through the production of 1975. I say "refracted"; it would be foolhardy to go further than this, because nothing is substantially altered, added or left out. Nevertheless the author of That Time and Footfalls (the last plays examined in this study) cannot but be in some measure different

from the author of Waiting for Godot. For one thing the author of the later plays will be intensely conscious of the possibilities and conditions of creativity which he has altered - shut off or dissipated - precisely by writing each successive play that comes before. In 1949 Godot might have seemed to have been created out of the scorched earth; and yet how relaxed and expansive it seems by the side of Not I or That Time or Footfalls. The 1975 production of Godot can function as an index, perhaps not of creative "development" - the word seems clumsy and inappropriate when applied to Beckett's work - but of something far more delicate and difficult to pin down: a narrowing of focus, a hardening of line and design, an increased emphasis, a peeling off ("the heart of the cauliflower or the ideal core of the onion would represent a more appropriate tribute to the labours of poetical excavation than the crown of bay", P3D, p.29).

"Beckett", wrote Marowitz, "believes there is an inevitable sort of correspondence between words and movement; certain lines simply cannot be delivered from certain positions and without compatible actions."⁴ Beckett told him: "Producers don't seem to have any sense of form in movement. The kind of form one finds in music; for instance, where themes keep recurring. When in a text, actions are repeated, they ought to be made unusual the first time, so that when they happen again - in exactly the same way - an audience will recognise them from before. In the revival of Godot (in Paris) I tried to get at something of that stylised movement that's in the play."⁵ When he went to Berlin in 1975 to produce Warten auf Godot he took with him a 105-page "Regie-buch" which exactly embodies these ideas. The first half of the book contains scenic arrangements. According to Beckett's production assistant Walter D. Asmus,

the second part of the book is classified by themes:
Lucky's movements; Estragon's feet; Estragon's sleep;
the whip; Vladimir, Estragon and the tree; examination
of location (with sketches); doubt-confusions; come,

let's go; help; what did I just say; heaven; sleep;
to remember; step-by-step approach.

Added to each of the thematic cues are the relevant lines or situations; or (as in the case of Lucky's monologue) descriptions or explanations concerning meaning. Both parts are diagonally connected, too: in the second, thematic part, there are references as to where to find the relevant lines of the first part, and vice-versa... The classification by themes reveals the structure of the production: although under each heading there is an enumeration of all the places where the theme comes up, it cannot be regarded as a mere catalogue. For - and this can be followed through in the diagonal connections - in the blocking and in the construction of the dialogues there is a structure of repetitions, variations, similarities, parallels, of echoes and accumulated references, and these are realised in the production as concrete structure and form.⁶

Asmus records how Beckett explains the purpose of this meticulous planning to his actors: "To give confusion shape,⁷ he says, a shape through repetition, repetition of themes. Not only themes in the script, but also themes of the body. When at the beginning Estragon is asleep leaning on the stone, that is a theme that repeats itself a few times."⁸

The stylisation of movement which this directorial approach requires of the actor is underlined by an illuminating exchange between Beckett and his Berlin Vladimir, Stefan Wigger. The tramps are at one point required "to come together step by step"; Beckett demonstrates, speaking the text:

With each sentence, Beckett makes a step towards the imaginary partner. Always a step, then the sentence. Beckett calls this a step-by-step approach, a physical theme, which comes up five, six or seven times, and has got to be done accurately. This is the balletic side of the story. Lucky falls twice, and this mustn't be done realistically, but very cleanly.

Wigger: "Does that mean that there is no naturalism left whatsoever?"

Beckett demonstrates: he goes down on his knees and, his arms first upwards then stretching forwards, lets himself slide on the ground.

Wigger: "But how can one prevent the loss of all

human consideration, how can one prevent it from becoming sterile?"

Beckett: "It is a game, everything is a game. When all four of them are lying on the ground, that cannot be handled naturalistically. That has got to be done artificially, balletically. Otherwise everything becomes an imitation, an imitation of reality."

Wigger: "Are you implying a certain dryness?"

Beckett stands up: "It should become clear and transparent, not dry. It is a game in order to survive."⁹

Wigger's questions forestall the obvious initial critical response. Surely Beckett is here violating the balance which is apparent in the text of the play between the stylised and the naturalistic? Surely, as Ronald Hayman wrote in the most extended review in English of the production, in Godot "much depends on achieving subtle and unobtrusive gradations between the stylised and the realistic"?¹⁰ Yet Beckett the director does not yield ground on the point. The play "is a game, everything [presumably everything in it] is a game". He insists on the artificiality of everything in the work: the actor's movements are to be balletic just as the text they speak is musical (in terms of structure). And all this at the expense of the "imitation of reality". Indeed the exchange with Wigger allows us to state the matter in the crudest terms: artifice (or creation) versus imitation. But then this antithesis is an impossibly crude one. In fact Beckett is making a heavy emphasis. Naturalism (or realism) can be trusted to look after itself in the theatre. The "willing suspension of disbelief", which for a Western audience is so natural that we might hesitate to affirm that "willing" is involved at all, involves the assumption that what we are witnessing on the stage does in some way imitate reality as we know it. The playwright or director can rely on the assumption: even the heaviest stylisation will not eradicate it. The position is not one of either-or; even Beckett's insistence on artificiality cannot amount to more than a

heavy emphasis.¹¹

Nonetheless an emphasis was there in this production of Warten auf Godot, and it was very heavy - too heavy for at least one of the more thoughtful critics to take. It is worth considering in detail what was said about the production by Ronald Hayman in the review already mentioned. His major stricture seems a fair one:

What the production lacked was the appearance of casualness. Without becoming any more realistic, it could have been made to seem more unrehearsed, and surely it should have. It was very depressing that so many of the more intelligent critics used the word 'choreographed' as if they were paying an important compliment.¹²

This would seem to be a valid criticism of the theatrical execution of a particular production plan. Notice that Hayman acknowledges the overall style of the production by maintaining that it could have been improved "without becoming any more realistic". He is not criticising the directorial stylisation as such. He continues:

As a director Beckett tends to be over-musical. He knows a great deal about theatre but very little about acting, and this makes him tend simultaneously to both extremes - laissez-faire and authoritarianism. He has clear notions of the results he wants, but he does not know how to coax them out of the actors' creativity, so he works by pre-fabricating ideas and imposing rhythms which already exist inside his head.¹³

The first sentence here betrays Hayman's tendency to merge his criticism of Beckett's directorial performance with a more significant criticism of his directorial ideas. The merging is made that much plainer by the implied distinction Hayman has previously made between conception and execution: "Without becoming any more realistic, it could have been made to seem more unrehearsed..." But now Beckett the director "tends to be over-musical": the criticism extends to his whole musical-balletic conception. The apprehension is essentially the same as Wigger's: "But how can one prevent the loss of all human consideration, how can one prevent it from becoming sterile?" Hayman was most disturbed by the production when it gave him stylisation and

artificiality rather than realism or naturalism:

"A country road. A tree. Evening. Estragon is sitting on a low mound". The low mound has become a rectangular stone, and the tree, which has to stand in for the whole of nature, has become so unnatural that one has more the feeling of being indoors than outdoors, especially when the electric moon appears and climbs rapidly up the back wall...

...Funny though they were, the noises Horst Bollmann made in his struggle to tug his boot off were too theatrical, and the frozen poses at the beginning of the second act were more theatrical still.¹⁴ (my emphasis)

The moments that most impressed him were the most realistic :

The best moments in this production were the simplest - Stefan Wigger's quiet, frightened, stoical speaking of Vladimir's final monologue, Klaus Herm's heroically straightforward seriousness in Lucky's, the uncomplicated moments of tender rapprochement¹⁵ after the quarrels between Vladimir and Estragon.¹⁶

The sentence which follows is most interesting of all: "There were also some extremely powerful theatrical effects, even if one was too aware of the disparity between what seemed theatrical and what seemed real," Hayman's lack of sympathy with Beckett's directorial aims is by now plain enough. "What seemed real": how strange that phrase^{is} in the light of Beckett's remarks to his actors! "It is a game in order to survive" Beckett explained to Wigger. Hayman agrees that "the play is above all a game"¹⁷ but he cannot accept the full implication of the author's remark. He sees, as everyone does, that Vladimir and Estragon play games, and that to this extent it is entirely apt that a production of the play should contain stylised elements. The characters are conscious of playing and therefore conscious of the elements of stylisation which are introduced. But Hayman seems to require that the play's stylised elements should be contained within a naturalistic framework; that we should believe the scene, situation and characters to be "real" in the conventional theatrical sense, that the willing suspension of disbelief should be safely maintained. These demands - for as we shall see they are nothing

less - are at variance with not only Beckett's own production of his play but also the printed text.

Hayman's attitude to the "electric moon" which appears at the end of each act will serve to illustrate the point. The Berlin production simply followed the printed stage directions concerning the moon.

In each act it appears, right on cue, after the "running" exit of Mr. Godot's messenger-boy. Act I: "The light suddenly fails. In a moment it is night. The moon rises at back, mounts in the sky, stands still, shedding a pale light on the scene" (p.52).

Act II: "The sun sets, the moon rises. As in Act I" (p.92). It is a strange moment, at once poignant and comic, but one which, though it concerns the natural world, makes no concessions to naturalism (hence the comedy of it). But Hayman is disturbed because it gives him "more the feeling of being indoors than outdoors". He continues: "It was quite an amusing moon, but quite superfluous. In Beckett's script there is almost nothing that could be removed without loss; the loss of the moon would have been almost a gain."¹⁸ Beckett's moon is superfluous, it appears, because it does not behave like the real moon. Similarly the tree, "which has to stand in for the whole of nature", is "unnatural" and, again, "indoor". But the supporting argument here cannot merely be put to one side; the terms in which it is couched imply an interpretation of Godot which might fairly be taken as conventional and sound: the play as a metaphor of the human condition.

...while it doesn't matter that the tree is too small for us to believe that they are thinking seriously of hanging themselves from it - the thought isn't serious anyway - it does matter that the sense of artefact destroys the indeterminacy and the sense of continuum. Surely it is one of the play's main points that any place is much the same as any other place, while any time is much the same as any other time. The action is circular. We should be able to think that they were waiting for Godot yesterday and will be again tomorrow, and that it makes no difference whether they wait in the same place.

The endings and - more important - the beginnings of both acts should be almost imperceptible. When the lights go up we should feel that we have been with Vladimir and Estragon for hours; their conversation should seem to be no more or less than a continuation of the conversation that has been going on inside our heads.¹⁹

Hayman demands of the production that it should communicate not "the sense of artefact" but the more realistic "indeterminacy and the sense of continuum". For him the "electric moon", the "unnatural" tree and the tableaux at the beginning of each act are all mistakes. But his quarrel is with the play itself as it is printed rather than with this particular production of it. True, Beckett opened each act with a tableau when he produced and these tableaux are not in the original stage directions, but his artificial moon, as we have noted, only follows the text; the unnaturalness of the tree too is implied: what kind of "nature" is it in which a tree sprouts "four of five leaves" (p.57) overnight (Act II is "next day"). "The action is circular", certainly, not because Beckett "sees reality" like that but because the game is that shape. Again the emphasis is on creation rather than imitation.

Beckett's Berlin production of Waiting for Godot underlined something which has always been there. When we call Godot a self-conscious play, we do not just mean that it is a play which contains self-conscious elements (games) within a conventional "realistic" framework but that even this framework - the set, the props, the actors' movements - is stylised, part of a game: the play in toto is a game. And that, as we saw, was what Beckett the director told his actors: "everything is a game". Again it is important to emphasise that in his insistence on the stylisation of every element of the play Beckett is deliberately working against the "willing suspension of dis_belief" which can be assumed of any audience's response to any play, not in order to destroy it - it is a fact, and a not unhealthy one, of Western theatre - but in order to use it in the creation of a "consternation behind the form". The audience's "belief" in the reality of the stage world is, as it were, sabotaged and

partially undermined so that the very nature of the play becomes unstable. The theatrical illusion is jeopardised when the play seems, if only indirectly, to be commenting upon itself, as so often happens in Godot. A teasing exchange in Act II illustrates the point neatly :

Pozzo: Where are we?

Vladimir: I couldn't tell you.

Pozzo: It isn't by any chance the place known as the Board?

Vladimir: Never heard of it.

Pozzo: What is it like?

Vladimir: (Looking round). It's indescribable. It's like nothing. There's nothing. There's a tree.

Pozzo: Then it's not the Board.

Estragon: (sagging). Some diversion! (p.86).

If the blind Pozzo could see the "unnatural" tree he might change his mind! Estragon's comment, by underlining the dialogue as game, certainly brings us back to the board. Another such moment - and it comes twice for good measure - is when, within the space of a few seconds, night falls and the moon rises. As Hayman's rejection of this crucial detail in even the original text suggests, the theatrical "electric moon" might be regarded as a test case for an audience's critical response to the "artificiality" of Waiting for Godot. There are, after all, no two ways about this: one either accepts the manifest "unreality" of this moment and all it implies about the rest of the play, or one rejects it. The moon, like the tree which sprouts leaves overnight (or is it over the interval?) mocks and compromises our theatrical "belief" in the reality of the stage-world. Since in both cases important events of the natural world are absurdly accelerated, these moments in the play are not so much non-naturalistic as anti-naturalistic. It is at such moments that we are acutely conscious of a consternation behind the form of Godot.

The fundamental importance for the meaning of the play of the consternation behind the form can perhaps best be brought out by considering the conclusions of a critic whose assumptions and arguments are similar

to those of Hayman, though stated in literary and philosophical (or quasi-philosophical) terms rather than theatrical ones. In an important article entitled "Art and the Existential in En Attendant Godot",²⁰ Lawrence E. Harvey speaks of the "surfaces that Beckett is out to destroy", surfaces, that is, of habit, game and language, and argues that "art is here thought of as both destruction and re-creation, as a reordering of reality or breaking of surfaces that leads to an imitation of what is discovered at deeper levels of existence".²¹ He notes "the prior destruction of the many conventional, and often arbitrary, patterns within the comfortable limits of which we live, and which may keep us from coming to grips with the hard reality that is the human condition".²² "Convention and habit", he argues, "...in their stultifying rigidity, are neither good existence nor good art. They form surfaces that mask reality without providing the "diversion, distraction and délassement of art".²³ The comment about art prepares the way for a tripartite distinction which salvages a positive from the play : "The complacent bourgeois, traditionally attacked in France by the artist, remains within the fabric of the given world and takes this for reality. Those who come to recognise the arbitrary nature of conventional patterns may recoil into the trap of cynicism, while some will sink in despair on contact with the void and its spectres. On the difficult way leading towards maturity, however, others will reach the precarious and painful balance achieved by the true artist, who understands the utility of convention and the necessity of reality".²⁴ Harvey's arguments are founded on a dualism which is characteristic of the 'fifties "existentialism" which Godot is sometimes taken to exemplify: on the one hand are "convention and habit..., in their stultifying rigidity", symptomatic of the life lived in bad faith, and on the other the "deeper levels of existence" represented by "the hard reality that is the human condition", the level of

"good existence" and "good art". Or rather, one is on top of the other, since convention and habit hide the deeper levels of existence. It is ideas of this order which might be taken to provide the specifically literary and philosophical underpinning for Hayman's reaction to Beckett's Berlin production. Harvey speaks of "the necessity of reality" and it is precisely this which, in theatrical terms, Hayman insists upon in his criticism. For him, the tramps play games but a realistic framework is necessary. Neither Harvey nor Hayman can accept that "everything is a game"; both want the play to come "to grips with the hard reality of the human condition" like a good, bracing "existentialist" art-work.

Harvey's Godot, embodying as it does notions of "maturity", "the true artist", "good existence", "good art" and a necessary reality, seems an oddly moral play; whatever the case it is certainly not Beckett's Godot. "It is a game in order to survive" Beckett told his actors. The only necessity the characters acknowledge is the necessity to survive amidst the void of which, as Estragon drolly remarks at one point, there is "no lack" (p.66). They create against the void, and - this is the point of the total stylisation - they are themselves part of a structure created against the void. Filling that void is the necessity, and creation is therefore an imperative: the creator is obliged to create. Beckett's total stylisation works to undermine the audience's sense of the reality of the stage world because, for him and his characters, there is no reality, only more or less adequately created structures which serve to dyke up the void. Waiting for Godot is itself a created thing and it never allows us to forget that, just as we are never allowed to forget that the characters within it are committed to creation. The form of the play mirrors its content and vice-versa. Indeed, "here form is content, content is form".²⁵ And both hover vainly over the void which obliged them to be created in the first place.

Beckett does not attempt to "dramatise" or represent the void. He can only suggest its omnipresence behind the characters' games and the game that it is the play. However it is possible to say something more about this void. Let us turn to a characteristic and well-known passage, one of Vladimir's and Estragon's Act II duets :

Estragon: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.

Vladimir: You're right, we're inexhaustible.

Estragon: It's so we won't think.

Vladimir: We have that excuse.

Estragon: It's so we won't hear.

Vladimir: We have our reasons.

Estragon: All the dead voices.

Vladimir: They make a noise like wings.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Vladimir: Like sand.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Silence.

Vladimir: They all speak together.

Estragon: Each one to itself.

Silence.

Vladimir: Rather they whisper.

Estragon: They rustle.

Vladimir: They murmur.

Estragon: They rustle.

Silence.

Vladimir: What do they say?

Estragon: They talk about their lives.

Vladimir: To have lived is not enough for them.

Estragon: They have to talk about it.

Vladimir: To be dead is not enough for them.

Estragon: It is not sufficient.

Silence.

Vladimir: They make a noise like feathers.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Vladimir: Like ashes.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Long silence.

Vladimir: Say something!

Estragon: I'm trying.

Long silence.

Vladimir: (in anguish). Say anything at all!

Estragon: What do we do now?

Vladimir: Wait for Godot.

Estragon: Ah!

Silence. (pp.62-3)

I have quoted the section in toto so as not to interrupt or distort its scrupulously-wrought structure and overall rhythm. This is Godot at its most musical; few moments communicate so strongly a sense of the play itself as a made thing, an imaginative construction. And of course the dialogue is about the need ("They have to talk about it") to make things: the delicate interplay between sound and silence (and "long silence") is important because the subjects of the dialogue are sound and silence: "Say something!" "I'm trying". Vladimir and Estragon talk about what their talking prevents them from hearing and in doing so create an image of the void in the "dead voices". And just as the "dead voices" is only an image of the unimaginable void, they themselves can only be described by way of simile: "they make a noise like wings", "Like leaves", "Like sand", "Like feathers", "Like ashes", throwing off suggestions of the angel of death (wings), Sibyl's leaves, the sands of time and the ashes of the dead.

But if the void is unimaginable, its location is nonetheless inescapable. The mimetic effects of "Rather they whisper", "They rustle", "They murmur", "They rustle", whereby Vladimir and Estragon themselves whisper, rustle and murmur, mark out the "dead voices" as the ones we are hearing: the tramps' own. In describing the "dead voices" of the void, they describe themselves: "They all speak together"; "Each one to itself"; "What do they say?" "They talk about their lives" "To have lived is not enough for them" "They have to talk about it". In speaking of the void, Vladimir and Estragon speak of themselves - the circle is closed and vicious. The void is ontological: the tramps "have to talk" because they

cannot be. It is the void of identity which they are obliged to attempt to fill by creation, and thus their attempt is to create themselves. They have the sense of not being properly created, of never having been really born: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (p.89).

Pozzo's great image is itself an attempt to create the self by fixing it in a linguistic formulation. The relation between composure and composition is apparent here, for the image appears only when Pozzo is "calmer" after a "furious" outburst. We are, in other words, conscious that he has to invent this image; it is a created thing about the creation of the self. Vladimir's version of it which comes a few moments later is even more self-consciously studied:

"Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries." (pp.90-1). The deliberation - care for pace, rhythm and word order - on Vladimir's part is almost Joycean. And yet, as the words themselves tell us, this self-creation does not work: it is just another cry in the air. The image of the imperfect birth, the birth into the grave, is, as we have seen, a recurrent one in Beckett. It is the most explicit indication in Godot of the characters' ontological predicament. They are obliged to create against the void of identity because they do not feel themselves to have been properly created or properly born.

In the light of this great pivotal image the play's first exchange is hardly surprising :

- So there you are again.
- Am I?
- I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone forever.
- Me too. (p.9).

The theme is brought to its climax a few moments before the end of the play as Vladimir instructs Mr. Godot's boy :

Boy: What am I to tell Mr. Godot, sir?

Vladimir: Tell him...(he hesitates)...tell him you saw me and that...(he hesitates)...that you saw me. (Pause. Vladimir advances, the Boy recoils. Vladimir halts, the Boy halts. With sudden violence.) You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me! (Silence. Vladimir makes a sudden spring forward, the Boy avoids him and exit running. Silence...) (p.92)

We, the audience, saw Vladimir - and all the others too. But what did we see? Alain Robbe-Grillet writes of the tramps :

We suddenly realise, as we look at them, the main function of theatre, which is to show what the fact of being there consists in. For this is what we have never seen on the stage before, or not with the same clarity, not with so few concessions and so much force. A character in a play usually does no more than play a part, as all those about us do who are trying to shirk their own existence. But in Beckett's play it is as if the two tramps were on the stage without a part to play.²⁶

The implications of this are enormous :

The stage, hitherto a privileged resort of presence, was unable to resist for long. The ill spread there at the same inexorable pace as in the novels. After imagining for a moment that we had at last found man himself we are forced to admit our mistake. Didi was only an illusion - that perhaps explains his dancing walk, that shifting about from one leg to the other, that costume vaguely reminiscent of a clown's. He too was no more than a lie, a provisional being, who sank back again into the world of dream, the world of fiction.

"I was never there", says Hamm, and in the face of this confession nothing counts any more, for it is impossible to understand it otherwise than in its most generalised form : No one has ever been there.²⁷ (Robbe-Grillet's emphasis.)

Writing in 1963, Robbe-Grillet points out the real interpretative reason for the total stylisation Beckett was to insist upon when he came to direct his own play twelve years later. Robbe-Grillet sees Didi and Hamm as what might be termed parody presences, for neither of them is really there. He stresses, as did Beckett the director,

the stylisation of appearance and movement in Godot. Vladimir is made up of "theatricalisations", made up of his poses, his walk, his parts in the "canters", his pratfalls, his clownish gestures, his boots, his hat and his other clothes, made up of his role in general. In a sense he is a stylisation. And where is he, his essential self, the self which is really there. Is the body after all not intrinsic to the self but an ill-functioning machine by way of which the self - wherever it may be - interacts with the world as best it can? The essential self is perhaps not there at all. And this presence is therefore only a parody of presence. Lawrence E. Harvey records that "an image Beckett used repeatedly to express his sense of the unreality of life on the surface was "existence by proxy"". Robbe-Grillet's term "provisional being" echoes the Beckettian phrase remarkably closely. When seen in terms of the theatre, both phrases denote a parody of presence rather than a real presence.

The relation between realism and reality in Beckett's theatre is now becoming clearer. As a director Beckett insists upon stylisation at the expense of realism because he wants to communicate a sense of the play and everything in it as a fictional creation, one which is essentially provisional and which exists only "by proxy" because reality, and more especially the reality of the self, is impossible of creation. Realism would be a lie because the "real" self is uncreated. Stylisation, on the other hand, suggests overwhelmingly the processes of creation - both the characters' and the playwright's. What we see is not, in the usual theatrical sense, "real", but provisional. "There is a consternation behind the form."

I have been trying to suggest that, among other things Waiting for Godot is about creativity and the obligation to create. And yet this is perhaps not something which is immediately obvious - or rather it is not something which is normally seen in these terms. Clearly the tramps fill up time and space with their games and routines, but ~~these~~

are not things which would normally be taken to represent "creativity". Of creativity one expects something rather more exalted and "serious". And is not the central metaphor of the play that of waiting rather than anything to do with making? It will of course be pointed out that the game, since it is, in the author's own words, "a game in order to survive", has all the seriousness and urgency we might expect of creativity. Nonetheless the central metaphor does mean that there is a pervasive sense of passive rather than active impotence. We remember the tramps as waiters, rather than as makers.

Plainly this is a matter of emphasis rather than of distinction - Vladimir and Estragon both wait and create; they create whilst they wait. Nevertheless it is an emphasis which suggests the fundamental difference between Godot and the rest of Beckett's plays. The "development" from Godot to the next play, Endgame, is best described as a development in self-consciousness about the creative process. With its morality-play range and "universality", and the essentially passive nature of its central metaphor, Godot is not explicitly concerned with the process and nature of creativity. Its finest textual image, that of the "difficult birth" "astride of a grave" which is introduced near the end by Pozzo and elaborated by Vladimir in his final monologue, is isolated and unique, making its effect largely for those reasons. The play makes little of conception or of creative activity as such: there is little or no consciousness here of making. Process is assumed - either to be or not to be. Such is not the case with Endgame. Here images of creativity and destruction proliferate and the creative process itself, in the obsessive person of Hamm, moves to the centre of the stage.

Perhaps not surprisingly, as the physical action of Beckett's drama becomes progressively constricted and static, its linguistic "action" becomes correspondingly more urgent and self-concerned. Thus in Endgame and the plays which follow, it is the linguistic dimension of the drama which is to be our predominant concern. There can be, for one thing, no

argument about the stylisation of the stage set in Endgame. It is a room, a closed space, and not, as in Godot, an open one; the interior is carefully described for the benefit of the designer, and the props are exactly specified. There is very little freedom for "realism" here, and if the designer or director indulges himself in this direction, he is liable to be quite simply wrong. The open space of Godot, on the other hand, might suggest that the author only specifies the stage as open ("A country road. A tree.") in order to give the "interpreter" the chance to fill it up. Marowitz reports that Beckett "was dissatisfied with the original London production" and quotes him as observing : "The text asks for a bare stage - except for this tree, and there the stage was so cluttered the actors could hardly move."²⁸ (Even from photographs of Peter Hall's production one can see what Beckett means.) Perhaps the dissatisfied playwright learnt from that experience. Yet, despite insurmountable difficulties at certain points (the moon-rise, for example), a comparatively "realistic" Godot - the kind Hayman demands - is by no means an automatic failure. The play is, I think, available to the director who adopts a less stylised approach than Beckett's, even though he might be contradicting what Beckett himself, as director in 1975, specified. Perhaps after all Godot, the play of 1949, is more open than the later Beckett, the author of That Time and Footfalls, insists. The concern with creativity which is so ruthlessly to enforce abstraction and stylisation at every level is not yet explicit and pervasive. That comes with Endgame.²⁹

Chapter Two : ENDGAME

French version : written December 1955-October 1956; first performed 3 April 1957.

English version: translated 1957? ; first performed 28 January 1958.

"What is there to keep me here?" "The dialogue " (p.39). "Did you never hear an aside before?...I'm warming up for my last soliloquy." "Not an underplot, I trust " (p.49). "This is what we call making an exit " (p.51). Even more obviously than Godot, Endgame is conscious of itself as a parody of a play. As T.W.Adorno notes : "The dramatic constituents appear after their death. Exposition, intrigue, action, peripeteia and catastrophe return as decomposed participants in a dramatical inquest."¹ The stage-set is designed to match. The tree and the moon in Godot are theatrical and not naturalistic. The stage directions imply this, nevertheless it had to be insisted upon. But surely there can be no argument about the stylisation of the stage-picture of Endgame :

Bare interior.
Grey light.
Left and right back, high up, two small windows, curtains drawn.
Front right, a door. Hanging near door, its face to wall, a picture.
Front left, touching each other, covered with an old sheet, two washbins.
Centre, in an armchair on castors, covered with an old sheet, Hamm.
Motionless by the door, his eyes fixed on Hamm, Clov. Very red face.
Brief tableau. (p.11)

Even the title of the play (in either language) gives, as it were, the game away. And it is clear that the characters are not only players but also pieces to be played with, as in chess: the king Hamm and his knight Clov both have "very red" faces, whilst the defunctive parental pawns Nagg and Nell both have "very white" faces. Games are also being played with the audience. Beckett teases us with such portents of

significance and meaning as the characters' names, the picture turned facing the wall, Hamm's veronica and, most important of all, the nature of what is outside the stage-refuge. Even the characters' physical debilities - Clov's "stiff, staggering walk" (p.11), and inability to sit down, Hamm's blindness and inability to stand up, and the parent's' loss of their "shanks" - though their primary function is no doubt to increase our sense of the body as a wrecked machine, make themselves felt as an element of the play's stylisation. As they themselves point out, Hamm and Clov are made complementary, interlocking :

Hamm: Sit on him!

Clov: I can't sit.

Hamm: True. And I can't stand.

Clov: So it is.

Hamm: Every man his speciality. (p.16)

The dialogue too, as this specimen illustrates, is even more stylised than that of Godot. As Ronald Gaskell comments, "it is an art more abstract than one would have thought possible in the theatre".² In Endgame we are several degrees nearer to the abstraction of music even than in Godot. In a discussion of the linguistic structure of the earlier play the musical analogy is frequently invited but here it virtually forces itself upon us.³

Ruby Cohn⁴ notes that in rehearsing his Berlin production of Endspiel (in 1967) Beckett used musical terminology - legato, andante, piano, scherzo, fortissimo - and indeed, given his directorial approach to Godot, that is exactly what we should expect him to do. In the same rehearsals Beckett spoke of the operation of an essentially musical "echo principle"⁵ in the play: "There are no accidents in Fin de Partie. Everything is based on analogy and repetition."⁶

The "echo principle" not only accounts for the meticulous mechanical construction of the play, scaffolding around which it was built; it also suggests the presence of a symbolic structure, though one which

is operating on a far more abstract level than the usual modernist symbolic structure (as in, say, The Waste Land). In order to investigate the implications of this high degree of abstraction we need to begin with a conventional discussion of the play's symbolic organisation. Let us turn first to the most richly complex (though perhaps not the most obvious) of its structural parallelisms. Slightly later than half-way through the play Hamm tells Clov to oil the castors of his armchair. Clov replies that he "oiled them yesterday".

Hamm: Yesterday! What does that mean? Yesterday!

Clov: (violently). That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent.

Pause.

Hamm: I once knew a madman who thought the end of the world had come. He was a painter - and engraver. I had a great fondness for him. I used to go and see him, in the asylum. I'd take him by the hand and drag him to the window. Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness! (Pause.) He'd snatch away his hand and go back into his corner. Appalled. All he had seen was ashes. (Pause.) He alone had been spared. (Pause.) Forgotten. (Pause.) It appears the case is...was not so...so unusual. (p.32)

I want to place by the side of this Clov's final speech, his aria di sortita, which he delivers when Hamm requests "something...from your heart...A few words...from your heart."

Clov: (fixed gaze, tonelessly, towards auditorium). They said to me, That's love, yes yes, not a doubt, now you see how -

Hamm: Articulate!

Clov: (as before). How easy it is. They said to me, That's friendship, yes yes, no question, you've found it. They said to me, Here's the place, stop, raise your head and look at all that beauty. That order! They said to me, Come now, you're not a brute beast, think upon these things and you'll see how all becomes clear. And simple! They said to me, What skilled attention they get, all these dying of their wounds.

Hamm: Enough!

Clov: (as before). I say to myself - sometimes, Clov you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you - one day. I say to myself - sometimes, Clov, you must be there better than that if you want them to let you go - one day. But I feel too old, and too far, to form new habits. Good, it'll never end, I'll never go. (Pause.) Then one day, suddenly, it ends, it changes, I don't understand, it dies, or it's me, I don't understand that either. I ask the words that remain - sleeping, waking, morning, evening. They have nothing to say. (Pause.) I open the door of the cell and go. I am so bowed I only see my feet, if I open my eyes, and between my legs a little trail of black dust. I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit. (Pause.) It's easy going. (Pause.) When I fall I'll weep for happiness. (pp.50-1)

Both passages concentrate on the sense of having been left behind, spared or "forgotten", which is one of the moving forces of the play. Yet there is nothing simple about this sense. In a sketch Beckett wrote after Endgame, so similar in its chief elements (the two characters are an old man in a wheelchair and a blind but mobile fiddler amidst a ruined urban landscape) that one could take it as his attempt to write himself out of the impasse created by the finished play, a blind man says :

Sometimes I hear steps. Voices. I say to myself, They are coming back, some are coming back, to try and settle again, or to look for something they had left behind, or to look for someone they had left behind. (EAO, p.63)

The tone and rhythms, with the accompanying syntactic structure ("Sometimes...I say to myself, They...") are virtually identical to Clov's (though the "someone they had left behind" is more obviously reminiscent of Hamm's mad painter). But the Endgame situation is rather more complex. The stage-picture of Theatre I - "Street corner. Ruins". (EAO, p.61) - might be taken, in the light of the two speeches from Endgame, simply as an image of the speaker's mind or of how he "sees" the world - "All he had seen was ashes." He waits, perhaps, and yearns for the re-unification which is represented by the return

of "them": an image in social terms of a psychological restoration. In contrast, the "corpsed" world of Endgame is off-stage: "outside of here it's death" (p.15). In front of us we see only a "bare interior. Grey light. Left and right back, high up, two small windows, curtains drawn". Hugh Kenner's observation is well known; when Clov draws the curtains, says Kenner, "this is so plainly a metaphor for waking up that we fancy the stage, with its high peepholes, to be the inside of an immense skull".⁷ When Clov looks out of the stage-eyes he, like the mad painter, sees the ashes of a "corpsed" world. This outside world is for the spectator not an objective fact - as it is in Theatre I (or would be if it were ever staged) - but a datum of the perception of one particular individual, Clov. Thus, whereas in Theatre I the "corpsed" world is a given fact - we see it represented on stage - in Endgame it is a perceived thing, the perception of which depends on the state of consciousness of one of the characters. We can "see" the outside only through Clov, just as he can only see it through his telescope ("One day you'll be blind, like me", p.28.). This is an important point because, turning to the two speeches under consideration, we find that in both cases the sufferer (the mad painter, Clov) looks upon - is forced to look upon - the same landscape as the punisher (Hamm, "they") but sees exactly the opposite; and what he sees obviously depends upon the state of his consciousness. The sense of being "spared" or "forgotten" in Endgame is primarily a mental or psychological one. In one way it hardly matters if the outside world is as Clov describes it: What matters is that that is the way he perceives it to be, just as the mad painter perceived Hamm's "loveliness" as "ashes", and just as Clov himself perceives "their" "beauty" and "order" as a punishment. This is a play about the alienation and end of the mind rather than the end of the world. Having said this, we should be careful not to limit the larger resonances of Endgame too drastically. It has been suggested that the play is "simply a day in the life of a man at the end of his tether":

If Kenner is right in thinking that the stage setting is like that of a gigantic skull, then the play itself is a way of representing what goes on in the internal world of a man suffering from chronic depression, like Hamm or the mad painter or all those other madmen whose cause Beckett so urgently espoused in his novels.⁸

To suggest that the play actually goes on within the head of one of the fictions within the play - the mad painter, say - is, as we shall see when we come to Play and the latest dramas, nothing if not Beckettian. It is the logical end of the counterpointing between text and stage-picture which is to become so pervasive in Beckett's drama. But to raise the ontological question, "Who is the fiction of whom?", in relation to Endgame is I think to turn into a system something which exists only as a suggestion, albeit a potent one. Endgame will not be limited: it will not allow itself "simply" to be packed off into someone's head and it will not allow us to get rid of the "overtones" which are apt to create such a headache.⁹ As Beckett himself has said, the play is "rather difficult and elliptic, depending upon the power of the text to claw",¹⁰ that is, to tease out precisely those irritating overtones which make Endgame more than "simply a day in the life of a man at the end of his tether", or indeed, more than simply anything. I have said that the play is about the end of the alienated and sensitive mind, the mind that sees only ashes where others see beauty and order. Yet the hints are frequent and irresistible of a terminal situation which is nothing less than universal, apocalyptic. (Hamm's mad painter did, after all, think that "the end of the world had come").

If there are no alternative perceptions of the universe remaining it is because devastation is general: "The whole place stinks of corpses. The whole universe." (p.33). As Hamm remarks of his mad painter, "it appears the case is...was not so...sounusual". However we must not lose track of our original observation amongst the overtones. It needs to be emphasised that the central image of Endgame, resonant and pregnant as it is, has for its origin and core a particular psychological condition,

of which the skull-like appearance of the stage-picture serves as a permanent and teasing reminder. The play presents the end of the mind in apocalyptic terms.

Alvarez remarks that the "poignancy" of Endgame depends on the "continual tension between a lost world of feeling, once known and still yearned for, and the devastated present", and that the "glimmerings" of "the knowledge of something valuable that has been irredeemably lost"¹¹ go to make up a real tragic sense in the play. The contrast between a richly fertile past and the devastated present is certainly an important factor in the play: it emerges powerfully, if briefly, in Hamm's evocation of the landscape he showed the mad painter: "Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness." And yet our sense of the past in Endgame is not a firm one. Hamm himself harbours ontological doubts:

Hamm: Clov.

Clov: (absorbed [He is looking out of the window]). Mmm.

Hamm: Do you know what it is?

Clov: (as before). Mmm.

Hamm: I was never there. (Pause.) Clov!

Clov: (turning towards Hamm, exasperated). What is it?

Hamm: I was never there.

Clov: Lucky for you.

He looks out of window.

Hamm: Absent always. It all happened without me. (p.47)

And Clov's final speech comes to a climax in the bitter statement: "I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit." He and Hamm make for themselves a duality, that of light/darkness, which, so far as they know, never really existed. They use it in order to make some sense of their present situation, breaking the existential flux up into contrasting components, and endowing each of these components with a particular moral and existential charge. "Grey light" states Beckett with characteristic baldness in his initial stage-direction, but Hamm

at least insists on separating up grey into black-white (without these contrasting colours there would be no chess game), light-dark, often with comical consequences:

Enter Clov holding by one of its three legs a black toy dog.

He hands the dog to Hamm who feels it, fondles it.

Hamm : He's white, isn't he?

Clov : Nearly.

Hamm : What do you mean, nearly? Is he white or isn't he?

Clov : He isn't. (p.30)

Hamm : Is it night already then?

Clov : (Looking). No.

Hamm : Then what is it?

Clov : (Looking). Grey. (Lowering the telescope, turning towards Hamm, louder.) Grey! (Pause. Still louder.) GRREY! Pause. He gets down, approaches Hamm from behind, whispers in his ear.

Hamm : (starting). Grey! Did I hear you say grey?

Clov : Light black. From pole to pole.

Hamm : You exaggerate. (p.26)

This chain of imagery, which begins with Hamm's comment about his own blind eyes, "it seems they've gone all white" (p.13), is brought to an ironic climax by his "composition" in his final soliloquy of a line of Baudelaire :

A little poetry. (Pause.) You prayed - (Pause. He corrects himself.) You CRIED for night: it comes - (Pause. He corrects himself.) It FALLS: now cry in darkness. (He repeats, chanting.) You cried for night; it falls: now cry in darkness. (Pause.) Nicely put, that. (p.52)

Clov uses the same duality, despite his realisation of its falsity ("I never saw it lit"):

Clov : I'll leave you, I have things to do.

Hamm : In your kitchen?

Clov : Yes.

Hamm : What, I'd like to know.

Clov : I look at the wall.

Hamm : The wall! And what do you see on your wall?
+ Mene, mene? Naked bodies?

Clov : I see my light dying.

Hamm : Your light dying! Listen to that! Well, it can die just as well here, your light. Take a look at me and then come back and tell me what you think of your light. (p.17)

Perhaps the best-known instance of light-darkness imagery is Mother Pegg :

Hamm : Is Mother Pegg's light on?

Clov : Light! How could anyone's light be on?

Hamm : Extinguished!

Clov : Naturally it's extinguished. If it's not on it's extinguished.

Hamm : No, I mean Mother Pegg.

Clov : But naturally she's extinguished! (p.31)

* * * * *

Clov : (harshly). When old Mother Pegg asked you for oil for her lamp and you told her to get out to hell, you knew what was happening then, no? (Pause.) You know what she died of, Mother Pegg? Of darkness. (p.48)

A few moments later Hamm himself takes up the death-of-darkness image :

Clov : (imploringly). Let's stop playing!

Hamm : Never! (Pause.) Put me in my coffin.

Clov : There are no more coffins.

Hamm : Then let it end! (...) With a bang! (...) Of darkness! (p.49)

"I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit."

Existing without understanding amidst the ruined "GRREY" world of

Endgame, Hamm and Clov "divide" the grey, the only experience they have ever

had, into the white of day-light, rightness, richness, fertility and

life, and the black of night, darkness, ruin, aridity and devastation. In

doing this, they are both locating themselves in a particular pattern (the

darkness, or the near-darkness) and creating a mythology for themselves

of an idealised past, a past which is now "extinguished" and which they missed. Their fictive dualism enables them to think temporally in an apparently non-temporal universe and to conceive of richness in the midst of a wasteland. This simple mental system is crucial to the continuance of the end-game.

Even the implied geography of the Endgame -world is a mental or mythical geography, relying as it does less on ideas or information than on individual words which light up the otherwise stark grey text. All the alternative worlds are exotic-sounding :

Hamm : Did you ever think of one thing?....That here we're down in a hole. (Pause.) But beyond the hills? Eh? Perhaps it's still green. Eh? (Pause.) Flora! Pomona! (Ecstatically.) Ceres! (Pause.) Perhaps you won't need to go very far. (p.30)

Nell : It was in the Ardennes.
They laugh less heartily.

Nagg : On the road to Sedan. (p.19)

Nell : It was on Lake Como. (Pause.) One April afternoon. (Pause.) Can you believe it?.... It was deep, deep. And you could see down to the bottom. So white. So clean. (p.21)

Add to these Nagg's taste for "Turkish Delight, for example, which no longer exists" (p.38); Hamm's former subjects "at Kov, beyond the gulf" (p.36), (and a gulf there certainly is between that past and this present), and Hamm's dog: "He's a kind of Pomeranian." (p.30). In each case a single word lights up the text with a mythopoeic glow. Both the mythic past and the exotic elsewhere of Endgame are above all linguistic creations.

It is not only romantic and exotic words which have a mythopoeic effect. If language as a semantic system can be used to create a mythical past which helps to explain the experience of grey atemporal flux (an imagined fertile past implies a universal holocaust), then the same system will inevitably imply a mythical present, an "after-time" of

desolation and devastation. If words call forth from the flux a yesterday, they will also call forth a today. Even these simple everyday words threaten to cave in in Endgame :

Ham: Yesterday! What does that mean? Yesterday!

Clov: (violently). That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything anymore, teach me others. Or let me be silent.

The myths the language transmits, the myths words are, have become transparent and impotent in the terminal world :

I ask the words that remain - sleeping, waking, morning, evening.

They have nothing to say.

The related dualisms of the play - light/darkness, white/black, day/night, yesterday/today, lit/extinguished, waking/sleeping, morning/evening - are seen for what they are: so many intellectual efforts to mythologise, to gain control of and therefore to survive in a world of meaningless flux.

The moribund structures make "experience" itself impossible to define :

Hamm: ...Clov!

Clov: Yes.

Hamm: Nature has forgotten us.

Clov: There's no more nature.

Hamm: No more nature! You exaggerate.

Clov: In the vicinity.

Hamm: But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!

Clov: Then she hasn't forgotten us.

Hamm: But you say there is none.

Clov: (sadly). No one that ever lived ever thought so crooked as we.

Hamm: We do what we can.

Clov: We shouldn't. (p.16)

Clov succeeds in breaking down Hamm's dualism of nature (before)/non-nature (now) but in the process forfeits his own opinion that "there's no more nature", so that in the end it does not matter whether there is

such a thing as nature or not. The arguments cancel each other out and neither player wins. But then winning the endgame is hardly the point: the playing is the strategy of survival - itself a meaningless exercise - until the end comes. The game is language, and the play is about the struggle with this inevitably defunct tool of perception and survival.

Endgame, then, we need to reassert, is concerned not just with a terminal world but with the survival of the perceiving and creating self within a terminal world - a more subtle and complex matter altogether. Wordsworth, the great poet of the relation between perception and creation, declared himself "a lover"

of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear - both what they half create,
And what perceive. ("Tintern Abbey," ll.105-7)

Thus it can be on the "green earth", but on the grey earth of Endgame the delicate balance between creation and perception (so exquisitely enacted in the Wordsworth by the line-ending) is impossible. Nor is the need and possibility of this balance merely excluded from the play. Indeed what seems to be a decisive moment in the drama turns on exactly this issue of the perception and/or creation of the external world. Near the end of the play Clov, looking out of the window, sights a small boy. He offers to "go and see"; "I'll take the gaff", he adds. "No!" cries Hamm.

Clov : No? A potential procreator?

Hamm : If he exists he'll die there or he'll come here.
And if he doesn't...Pause.

Clov : You don't believe me? You think I'm inventing?
Pause.

Hamm : It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I
don't need you any more.

Pause.

Clov : Lucky for you. (pp.49-50)

What is at issue here, as most critics (decoyed by the self-conscious

"symbolism" of the small boy) fail to see, is the actual existence of the boy. Clov's "You think I'm inventing?" should make it clear that what Hamm was going to say was not "And if he doesn't come here...", as most critics (astonishingly) seem to believe, but "And if he doesn't exist..." The game is at its most serious. Making the assumption that Clov is calling his bluff by inventing a small boy (presumably as an excuse to get outside and away from his master), Hamm in turn calls Clov's bluff by suggesting that the boy does not really exist and that because his servant has told him a lie - which he has seen through - he can now do without Clov. Clov's "You think I'm inventing?" (rather than the more obvious "You think I'm lying?") serves to remind us that Hamm himself has invented an "offstage" small boy in his "chronicle" - story (pp.35-7) - thus as far as Hamm is concerned Clov is probably only copying him anyway. The "echo-principle" is here working in a suggestive way, and in consequence it is impossible for us to draw the dividing line between reality and invention, perception and creation. If Hamm's "chronicle" was pure invention, that suggests that Clov has invented the small boy he "sees"; on the other hand if the "chronicle" was a fictionalised version of how Hamm came by the boy Clov, the "potential procreator" spotted by Clov might really be out there. At first it seems that when Clov makes his sighting we, the audience, are in substantially the same position as the blind Hamm - totally reliant on the servant and his telescope. But if Hamm knows the truth of his chronicle - is it "chronicle" or is it story (he calls it both but prefers the former)? - he may be surer about Clov's small boy than we can be.

The scene of the sighting of the small boy brings into sharp focus one of the most important factors about the play and the kind of response it invites. It is only here, when we need, for our own, conventional spectatorial purposes, to believe that what one of the characters says is true, when we need to be assured of an objective fact which might

actuate a turning point in the play, that we become fully aware of the nature of the play and our position in relation to it. For if we, like Hamm (or unlike Hamm?), cannot be sure whether or not Clov is inventing when he reports what he sees out of the window, if we cannot "believe" (on the terms of the "willing suspension of disbelief") this, how can we safely believe anything else he, or any of the other characters, has said during the play about anything other than that which we can corroborate with our own eyes? The grounds of the willing suspension of disbelief have been rendered unstable: this is the essence of Endgame - its game-ness. "In Endgame", writes Hugh Kenner "(which here differs radically from Godot) no one is supposed to be improvising; the script has been well committed to memory and well rehearsed."¹² This may be so, but something needs to be said about the vital ambiguity which is created by the fact of an audience. For the characters words are inert aural blocks emptied of all meaning ("If they don't mean anything anymore...") but for the audience, though this aspect - the game aspect - is of course inescapable, the normal semantic function of language is still a crucial element. The play only tends towards the abstraction of music: it has not achieved it. This is not "pure" game, consequently the conventional willing suspension of disbelief is still an important element of the spectator's response. For without this basic response the characteristic Beckettian consternation behind the form of Endgame would not make its effect. The essential ambiguity which surrounds the nature of the play would be lost.

When we look at the stage-set of Endgame we are looking at a visual image of the function of language in the play. In a world in which invention, fictional creation, is (as we have seen) always tending to become absolute and all forms tend towards abstraction, language, the only remaining creative medium, ceases to function as a medium, a tool or instrument for organising and making sense of the perceptions of an external world, and becomes instead a separate self-sufficient structure

in the midst of the alien environment. It is fitting, then, that the stage-picture of Endgame should represent a "refuge". The functions of language and the "refuge" in the play are identical. Both serve to insulate and protect rather than to mediate and connect. The words of the game are like the bricks of the refuge; metaphorically speaking, they are the bricks of the refuge.

Hamm leans towards wall, applies his ear to it.

Hamm : Do you hear? (He strikes the wall with his knuckles.) Do you hear? Hollow bricks!
(He strikes again.) All that's hollow! (p.23).

"Keep going, can't you, keep going!" (p.40), cries Hamm at one point. The game of language is a hated thing ("Why this farce, day after day? p.18) but existence is intolerable without the refuge it provides :

Clov : (imploringly). Let's stop playing!

Hamm : Never! (p.49)

To leave the refuge would mean to leave "the words that remain" : "They have nothing to say (...) I open the door of the cell and go. I am so bowed I only see my feet, if I open my eyes, and between my legs a little trail of black dust." The last image, one of existence outside the word-refuge, is one of slow yet inexorable dissolution of self. Even at the "end", Hamm and Clov are bound by a basic ontological necessity to their hated "cell", which is at once a structure of hollow bricks and a game of hollow words. Existence, such as it is, is the game.

But there is a further, more complex dimension to Beckett's conception of the nature of language in this play. It is hinted at by the Shakespearean allusion in the English version of Clov's outburst about words :

I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything anymore, teach me others. Or let me be silent.

Caliban to Prospero and Miranda (I quote also the lines which lead up

to the relevant passage, since the juxtaposition of prison and language seems extraordinarily suggestive in the light of the Endgame situation) :

Miranda : But thy vile race,
Though thou didst learn had that in't which
good natures
Could not abide to be with ; therefore wast thou
Deservedly confin'd into this rock,
Who hadst deserv'd more than a prison.

Caliban : You taught me language ; and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language! (The Tempest, I, ii, 360-7)

In both Endgame and The Tempest the master forces the alien system of his own language on the slave and is in turn cursed with that very language. Language stands as an omnipresent emblem of the master-slave relationship. In Endgame, however, language seems not only to represent that relationship but also to take its place within it as the master. If we consider Clov's last speech by the side of Hamm's reminiscence about the mad painter, the alignment of Hamm with Clov's tyrannical "they" is unavoidable in the light of his treatment of the madman : "I'd take him by the hand and drag him to the window." Clov : "They said to me, 'Here's the place, stop, raise your head and look at all that beauty.'" Yet as he continues, we feel that Clov's "they" are far more terrible than Hamm (whose gesture - "I'd take him by the hand" - is at least one of companionship and goodwill). In fact "they", the tyrants whose evoked values consist only in dead words ("beauty", "order"), seem to merge with the words, to become the words :

I don't understand...I ask the words that remain - sleeping, waking, morning, evening. They have nothing to say.

The words too are "they", silent implacable personifications of dead meaning. The sense of words as people - the tyrannⁿisers of Clov - is even more acute in the French original, where language itself plays into

the playwright's hands :

Je le demande aux mots qui restent - sommeil, reveil,
soir, matin. Ils ne savent rien dire.¹³

"Restent" is perhaps more suggestively concrete than "remain" and "they know (of) nothing to say" is a more explicit personification than "they have nothing to say" (though the English sounds far more implacable). The two versions of Clov's outburst about yesterday present a similar case. I quote the English again :

Hamm : Yesterday! What does that mean! Yesterday!

Clov : (violently). That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent.

Hamm : Hier! Qu'est - ce que ^{ça} veut dire. Hier!

Clov : (avec violence). - Ça veut dire il y a un foutu bout de misère. J'emploie les mots que tu m'as appris. S'ils ne veulent plus rien dire apprends - m'en d'autres. Ou laisse-moi me taire. ¹⁴

One does not think generally of words as doing something active when they mean - and this does not really come across in the English. By linking the ordinary idiomatic "ça veut dire" with "s'ils ne veulent plus rien dire..." (where "ils" are "les mots") Beckett nudges the idiom to life and thus creates the suggestion that when words mean it is a volitional act; literally: "They no longer want to say anything."

Hamm, though himself a ruined tyrant, is no less subject to the tyranny of language than his own slave. But, as we have seen, he is not so much punished by words as teased and led on by them. They dangle like carrots before him the possibilities of meaning and escape. "To think perhaps it won't all have been for nothing!" (p.27), he cries "vehemently" when he imagines a "rational being" come "back to earth" (yet another suggestion that the world was once lit with meaning and "rationality").

The desire for rationality is a desire for the agents of rationality, words, still to mean. It is because Hamm is still so attached to words and all their existence implies that they tease him so cruelly. As we have already noted, it is in terms of the individual word that he conceives of his alternative, paradisaal world : "Flora! Pomona! (...) Ceres!" Similarly, it is the word rather than the idea which climaxes his fantasies :

If I could sleep I might make love. I'd go into the woods. My eyes would see...the sky, the earth. I'd run, run, they wouldn't catch me. (Pause.) Nature! (p.19)

(with ardour). Let's go from here, the two of us! South! You can make a raft and the currents will carry us, far away, to other...mammals! (p.28)

Mother Pegg is not just described with an allusion; in a sense she is an allusion :

She was bonny once, like a flower of the field. (p.31)

Again and again Hamm is carried away by the delusive current of his own eloquence, only to be brought back to the realisation that "Ceres" or "nature" or the "South" is just the cruel^lest trick of the language-shelter, still only words. Language used to be Hamm's slave: he "invented" it, used it to build himself a shelter that would protect him from the devastated outside, and taught it to his slave. But a relationship with language can never be static - "pure" medium can never be pure: now he is the slave, together with his own slave, and words the masters ("The medium is the master") :

Clov : What is there to keep me here?

Hamm : The dialogue.

The dialogue, not Hamm himself.

The relationship between the characters of Endgame and their personified tyrant language must remind us of that other master-slave relationship in Beckett, the one between Pozzo and his carrier Lucky. Here again the

relationship is both perpetually commutative and perpetually interdependent (I need to quote at length) :

Pozzo : Guess who taught me all these beautiful things. (Pause. Pointing to Lucky.)
My Lucky!

Vladimir: (Looking at the sky.) Will night never come?

Pozzo : But for him all my thought, all my feelings, would have been of common things. (Pause. With extraordinary vehemence.) Professional worries! (Calmer.) Beauty, grace, truth of the first water, I knew they were all beyond me. So I took a knook.

Valdimir: (startled from his inspection of the sky).
A knook?

Pozzo : That was nearly sixty years ago...(he consults his watch)...yes, nearly sixty. (Drawing himself up proudly.) You wouldn't think it to look at me, would you? Compared to him I look like a young man, no? (Pause.) Hat! (Lucky puts down the basket and takes off his hat. His long white hair falls about his face. He puts his hat under his arm and picks up the basket.) Now look. (Pozzo takes off his hat. He is completely bald. He puts on his hat again. Did you see?)

Vladimir: And now you turn him away? Such an old and faithful servant.

Estragon: Swine!

Pozzo more and more agitated.

Vladimir: After having sucked all the good out of him you chuck him away like a...like a banana skin. Really...

Pozzo : (groaning, clutching his head). I can't bear it...any longer...the way he goes on...you've no idea...it's terrible...he must go...(he waves his arms)...I'm going mad...(he collapses, his head in his hands)...I can't bear it...any longer...

Silence. All look at Pozzo.

Vladimir: He can't bear it.

Estragon: Any longer.

Vladimir: He's going mad.

Estragon: It's terrible.

Vladimir: (to Lucky). How dare you! It's abominable! Such a good master! Crucify him like that! After so many years! Really!

Pozzo : (sobbing). He used to be so kind...so helpful...
and entertaining...my good angel...and now...he's
killing me. (WFG, pp.33-4)

This episode is funny but also puzzling. Just prior to it Pozzo has said, "lyrically", that "the tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh" (WFG, p.33). In fact, the principle of a fluid constant seems to underline the whole passage, taking in hair (Lucky has "all", Pozzo none), intelligence (Lucky taught Pozzo "all these beautiful things") and mastery (Lucky seems for a moment to be taking Pozzo over). Endgame several times evokes this fluidity of relationship within a constant framework: "Yes", Hamm prophecies to Clov, "one day you'll know what it is, you'll be like me..." (pp. 28-9) and his prophecy is paralleled by Nagg's curse - Nagg, who is in his second childhood, and whom we first heard calling for "me pap!" (p. 15, (a pun: both his pappy biscuit and his papa) : "Yes, I hope I'll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark, and I was your only hope" (p. 38). Human existence is itself the constant quantity within which the variation takes place. The Godot episode is especially suggestive in the light of what we have said about Endgame. In it a master tells how he took a slave who taught him to speak certain words, words about (and such as) "beauty, grace, truth of the first water" (compare the "beauty" and "order" which Clov's "they" insist upon), but who is now in some way terrorising his master, "killing" him even. Lucky, silent for most of the time, is [^]no[^]theless a ^acreature of language. When he is ordered to "think", he speaks: his "thought" is words; thought and language, as always in Beckett, are synonymous. (And most of the "think" is about the pathetic inadequacy of language and thought.) Pozzo calls Lucky his "knook", but what does that mean? Perhaps the point of the invented word is exactly that it is alien - looking, that

it is from a language which would have to be learned, as Pozzo learned Lucky's language. Whatever the case, the relationship of Lucky-language to Pozzo the master-learner presents a suggestive parallel to that between Hamm and the language which has come to tyrannise him. Both are images of a characteristically Beckettian situation : that of the fluid, unstable self at the mercy of a language which both sustains and violates it; the shelter and the tyrant. "He used to be so kind... so helpful...and entertaining...my good angel... and now...he's killing me."

Thus the two dominant images of Endgame - the stage-picture of the refuge and the master-servant relationship of the chief characters - are both metaphors of the way language functions in the play. But of course language can function neither as refuge nor as tyrant if it is not sustained and perpetuated by the creativity of the endgame players. Refuge and tyrant cannot exist independently of Hamm and Clov; they need to be continually and perpetually created, and it is for this reason that creativity stands as the large central concern of the play. Let us approach it by way of the two major speeches we started with.

I have left until now the observation of one of the most obvious and important contrasts between the two speeches: both are about the same situation, but whereas Clov describes it from the inside looking out - he is the object of punishment who is forced to raise his head and look - Hamm describes it from the outside looking in - it was he who dragged the madman to the window and exhorted him to witness the outside world. Of course Hamm has a dual perspective: now he is on the inside: "It appears the case is...was not so...so unusual." This allows him to have it both ways, for whereas Clov, irretrievably entrenched in his own situation, reveals the "beauty" and "order" "they"

show to him for the empty values they are, Hamm is able, even by way of a reminiscence, to evince a real belief in and commitment to the beauty and order he once evoked. Clov's grinding bitterness of tone serves to empty the invoked moral positives of value and to leave them hollow words :

They said to me, That's love, yes yes, not a doubt, how you see how - ...How easy it is. They said to me, That's friendship, yes yes, no question, you've found it. They said to me, Here's the place, stop, raise your head and look at all that beauty. That order! They said to me, Come now, you're not a brute beast, think upon these things and you'll see how all becomes clear. And simple! They said to me, What skilled attention they get, all these dying of their wounds.

The speech is to be delivered "tonelessly", but its strength is precisely there, in its tone. The same positives are present in Hamm's speech - yet how different the tone. "Love," "friendship" and "attention" :

He was a painter - and engraver. I had a great fondness for him. I used to go and see him, in the asylum. I'd take him by the hand and drag him to the window.

"Beauty" and "order", "clarity" and "simplicity" :

Look! There! All that rising corn! And there!
Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All
that loveliness!

The unreported (no "I said ..." to parallel Clov's "they said..."), exclamatory nature of the phrases serves to underline our sense of Hamm's commitment to the "loveliness". (It is interesting to note that whereas Clov deals entirely in abstractions, Hamm evokes concrete details.) For once his apprehension seems to be of something more than just words (though these, if only evanescent, are rich enough); a yearning for natural creativity.

When we talk about creativity of any kind in a Beckett work we are not automatically assuming the existence of a particular moral positive,

as we should be in discussing the work of almost any other writer. But if there is in Beckett no uncomplicated affirmation of creativity, neither, on the other hand, is there any absolute denial of it. Absolute affirmation would plainly be impossible, but, by the same token, absolute denial would be dishonest. No creative artist, not even one who proclaims himself impotent and a failure - perhaps least of all he -, can simply deny creativity, or at least he cannot deny it without seriously compromising the honesty and integrity (two qualities for which Beckett is consistently praised) of his enterprise. The complexity of Beckett's attitude towards creativity in his best work admits the possibility of and indeed the desire for denial without ever allowing the luxury of absolute denial.

As I have suggested, Hamm, with his poignant apprehension of natural beauty and order, is the chief agent of creativity in Endgame. The loadstone of his creative impulses, the scaffold about which they all accrue, also stands as the structural pivot of the play : his fictional "chronicle". This is, in Beckett's own words, "just about the centre of Endgame",¹⁵ and that its centrality may be rather more than just a matter of chronological positioning is suggested by the responses of some commentators. The story is one of cruelty - Hamm tells how he, or a fictional version of himself, once refused bread and corn to a starving retainer and his child - but as Hugh Kenner notes, the "technician's narcissism somewhat disinfects the dreadful tale".¹⁶ Anthony Easthope observes: "It is the continuous self-consciousness in Hamm's words and tone of voice as he tells the story which inhibits us from ascribing his cruelty to an impulse beyond the need for rhetorical coherence in the role he plays."¹⁷

^{is}
The narrative/frequently punctuated by comments like "No, I've done that bit," "That should do it," "There's English for you" and "A bit feeble, that," (all pp.35,36), all of which make it plain that

in his fiction, as in his life, Hamm's values are aesthetic rather than ethical :

(Narrative tone.)...He raised his face to me, black with mingled dirt and tears.

(Pause. Normal tone.) That should do it. (pp. 35-6)

"Yet", continues Easthope, "there are many suggestions in the telling of the story which imply that Hamm is seriously involved and that his fiction reflects real anxiety and suffering."¹⁸ He does not enlarge on the significance of these suggestions, but a fine intuition of Gerald Weales's (in a fairly early discussion of Endgame) centres on them interestingly :

Occasionally...Beckett seems to get caught in his own language. Take, for instance, another of the speeches of Hamm to the imaginary beggar: "But what in God's name do you imagine? That the earth will awake in spring? That the rivers and seas will run with fish again? That there's manna in heaven still for imbeciles like you?" Obviously, in context, the speech is one about the hopelessness of the human condition in which the first two questions about the natural world pick up a blackness from the third, the supernatural one. The exchange might as easily work the other way. Since Beckett is not likely to be sucked in by the pathetic fallacy (although Hamm might well be), one is tempted to assume that spring will return again and the rivers run with fish; manna, then, becomes a possibility and hope blooms incongruously on the sterile ground where the endgame is being played.¹⁹

Whatever the validity of his speculations, Weales's intuition of a power in the language (similar and indeed closely related to Hamm's earlier evocation of natural fertility to his madman) which is felt to be in some way disproportionate to the story-teller's immediate needs is I think a sure one. Let us consider Hamm's outburst in its context.

The chronicle is prefaced - and in a sense introduced - by two droll puns :

Hamm : (...Gloomily.) It's finished, we're finished.

(Pause.) Nearly finished. (Pause.) There'll be no more speech. (Pause.) Something dripping in my head, ever since the fontanelles. (Stifled hilarity of Nagg.) Splash, splash, always on the same spot. (Pause.) Perhaps it's a little vein - (Pause.) A little artery. (Pause. More animated.) Enough of that, it's story time, where was I?
(p.35, my emphases.)

The puns are comical, nonetheless they touch on the point at issue, creativity: is Hamm's art-ery²⁰ (his story) merely vain, or is it something more?

Hamm is telling himself and his unwilling "bottled" father a story which, though parts of it may be "true" (he calls it his "chronicle", thus suggesting that it is "historical"), bears all the characteristics of fiction, as we have noted. The speech is a long one and the actor is instructed to use two distinct "tones": the "narrative tone" in which the story is to be told and the "normal tone" in which Hamm is to comment on the story and his telling of it. As the story progresses the "normal tone" disappears and the "narrative tone" dominates to such an extent that it becomes increasingly difficult for us to apprehend the specified tonal distinction. The story is about a beggar - like Clov crawling at Hamm's feet for a bicycle (p.15); like Mother Pegg begging oil for her lamp (p.48); like Nagg asking for Turkish Delight (p.38); or like Hamm's own idea of the pathetic toy dog "begging me for a bone...standing there imploring me" (p.31). A man comes "crawling...on his belly" to Hamm's fictional version of himself, begging "bread for his brat", or "perhaps a little corn?"

Hamm goes on:

I lost patience. (Violently.) Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that! (Pause.) It was an exceedingly dry day, I remember, zero by the hygrometer. Ideal weather for my lumbago. (Pause. Violently.) But what in God's name do you imagine? That the earth will awake in spring? That the rivers and seas will run with fish again? That there's manna in heaven still for imbeciles like you? (Pause.) Gradually I cooled down,

sufficiently at least to ask him how long he had taken on the way. Three whole days. Good. In what condition he had left the child. Deep in sleep. (Forcibly.) But deep in what sleep, deep in what sleep already? (p.37)

Ostensibly Hamm is talking to his grovelling subject and his story enables him to re-enact the "great days" of his rule ("I inquired about the situation at Kov, beyond the gulf", p.36). But the instruction to the actor, who should still be in "narrative tone", to speak "violently" introduces a suggestive and fruitful ambiguity into the text, for whilst Hamm might conceivably only be acting his "violence", in performance it would be impossible to communicate any distinction between faked violence and genuine violence. At such heights the distinctions blur and violence becomes generalised and always genuine. In the telling of the chronicle we know that Hamm is meant only to be acting out the violence of his fictional self, yet here the impossibility (in practical terms) of the actor being able to communicate fine distinctions is even plainer. How does he - how do we - distinguish the "violent" "normal tone" from the "violent" "narrative tone"? The situation would become absurd: there is only one "violently". The intervening comments about the weather and his lumbago might seem at first to undermine any genuine passion, yet, paradoxically, they only serve to make the violence more extraordinary by offering such an acute contrast to it. Not only the words, but the changes of tone are violent; thus the urbane comments interact with rather than undermine the surrounding fury.

The point of this is that we feel Hamm's show of violence exceeds its object - even then and certainly now. Why do we feel such a grave and savage undercurrent to what is ostensibly only "acting"? The answers are within the play itself. We have noted Hamm's sense of and commitment to natural creativity. His "chronicle", itself a created thing, is his chief means of destroying, consciously or unconsciously,

that sense and that commitment.

To begin with: Hamm berates his vassal for imagining "that the earth will awake in spring", but it is he who has provoked Clov's violent response by inquiring about the sprouting of seeds :

Hamm : Did your seeds come up?

Clov : No.

Hamm : Did you scratch round them to see if they had sprouted?

Clov : They haven't sprouted.

Hamm : Perhaps its still too early.

Clov : If they were going to sprout they would have sprouted. (Violently.) They'll never sprout. (p.17)

Hamm belabours his vassal for anticipating the teeming foison of nature which will never return, yet in the play's anticipation of nature the ecstasy is all his :

But beyond the hills? Eh? Perhaps it's still green. Eh? (Pause.) Flora! Pomona! (Ecstatically.) Ceres! (Pause.) Perhaps you won't need to go very far.

Hamm rants at his vassal for imagining ("in God's name") there to be "manna in heaven still", but it is he who, immediately after he leaves his story, tries praying to God (who is only a name: "The bastard! He doesn't exist!" p.38). And it is here that the parallel between the "chronicle" and the mad-painter speech becomes important, for whilst he raves at the vassal for imagining "that the earth will awake in spring" and "that the rivers and seas will run with fish again", he also revels in the corresponding evocation for the madman: "Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness!"

At the beginning of the play Hamm declares :

Enough, it's time it ended, in the refuge too. (Pause.) And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to...to end. (p.12)

We never learn from the play why he hesitates to end, and though we can easily determine the answer by extrapolating back from the more obviously ontological concerns of the later plays, it would I think be wrong to claim that Endgame, concerned with being though it plainly is, communicates the same sense of ontological crisis as the plays which follow in its wake. Hamm worries about his there-ness on occasion and Clov imagines life outside the shelter as a slow dissolution of identity, but it is hard to see Hamm's "chronicle" as the desperate attempt to make himself which is, as we shall see, characteristic of the story-tellers and their stories in the later plays. No, the ontological imperative underpins Endgame without ever really showing itself.

Or does it show itself? The opening lines of Godot are awkward because they make a good joke out of what seems to be one of the play's central concerns :

- So there you are again.
- Am I?

Somehow the word "ontological" does not quite fit. Endgame has several such jokes.

- What? Neither gone nor dead?
- In spirit only.
- Which?
- Both. (p.45)

Or :

- Do you believe in the life to come?
- Mine was always that.(...) Got him that time! (p.35)

Or - and here we return to the "chronicle" - Hamm's asking himself about his story: "Silence! (Pause.) Where was I?" (p.35). Where indeed; not just "where have I got to in the story?" but also "where was I to be found in it?" As I have tried to suggest by quotation, the answer is Everywhere. Exemplifying a technique which is

characteristic of Beckett's handling of narrative forms within a play, Hamm's "chronicle" exists as an elaborately-worked metaphorical counterpoint to what we see before us as the "action" of the play, at least insofar as that action concerns Hamm. The story has three "characters" : the "I" is not Hamm as he was, but a fictional persona who does not "hesitate to end" or, indeed, hesitate to do anything. He takes the vassal "into service" ("He had touched a chord") only because "then I imagined already that I wasn't much longer for this world. (He laughs. Pause.) Well? (Pause.) Well? Here if you were careful you might die a nice natural death, in peace and comfort"(p.37). The "Well?" challenges himself to justify himself to himself, (Well, why did you take him into service?), as though the taking of a servant is the great mistake. The vassal is nothing less than a personification of Hamm's own impulse to survive - we have already noted the parallels. It is because of the contemptible vassal in him that Hamm hesitates to end.

The urge to survive fathers creativity: the little boy left "deep in sleep" "at Kov beyond the gulf" (Clov beyond the gulf?) stands as an explicit symbol of the creativity within himself which Hamm needs to renounce or deny, but which his urge to survive will not allow him to. Creativity is essential to survival. That is why Hamm speaks "forcibly" of the possibility of the "deep sleep" being the sleep of death. His violent fulminations against the vassal, like his evocation of natural "loveliness" for the mad painter, enable him to have it both ways (as Gerald Weales recognised) : he can anathematise creativity whilst at the same time colluding with it.

Eugene Webb writes that "from the context" the vassal's little boy "appears to be a symbol of fertility and vitality. He was left "deep in sleep" three full days earlier, recalling the period between the death and resurrection of Christ, whose birth Hamm is preparing to observe,

in a purely traditional way, with holly. Both the birth and resurrection of Christ are traditional symbols of the renewal of life, but Hamm refuses to contribute to the revival of the present embodiment of the same force."²¹ "Refuses to contribute"? But this is exactly the point. The "chronicle" trails off thus :

Hamm : In the end he asked me would I consent to take in the child as well - if he were still alive. (Pause.) It was the moment I was waiting for. (Pause.) Would I consent to take in the child...(Pause.) I can see him still, down on his knees, his hands flat on the ground, glaring at me with his mad eyes, in defiance of my wishes. (Pause. Normal tone.) I'll soon have finished with this story. (Pause.) Unless I bring in other characters. (Pause.) But where would I find them? (Pause.) Where would I look for them? (Pause. He whistles. Enter Clov.) Let us pray to God.

Nagg : Me sugar-plum!

Clov : There's a rat in the kitchen!

Hamm : A rat! Are there still rats?

Clov : In the kitchen there's one.

Hamm : And you haven't exterminated him?

Clov : Half. You disturbed us.

Hamm : He can't get away?

Clov : No.

Hamm : You'll finish him later. Let us pray to God. (p.37)

What is going on in this passage is an odd but characteristic bit of counterpointing between the stage-situation and the "situation" within Hamm's narrative. The moment Hamm says he was waiting for is also the moment we are waiting for. Will he or will he not consent to take in the child as well? Yet Hamm, hesitating to end as usual, sidesteps the crucial symbolic decision. Can he deny creativity and thus end? Or must he submit to the impulse for survival and accept creativity? Apparently he does neither: instead he starts talking about bringing in other characters and then decides to pray to God. This seems to be merely a bored, arbitrary abandonment of the subject, yet in one sense

the fiction is continuing, only on another level - having merged imperceptibly with the reality of the stage-situation. As narrator of the story, Hamm is a kind of God, and the great issue of his story, whether or not "he" will consent to "take in" the little boy, is directly parallel to his situation as narrator : "I'll soon have finished with this story (...) Unless I bring in other characters." And since he is the God of the story, it is only logical that he should pray to God for more characters ("But where would I find them? (...) Where would I look for them?") Clov and the rat in the kitchen present a second parallel to Hamm's predicament. As a direct result of Hamm's hesitations over creativity and the little boy, Clov has only half-exterminated the rat in the kitchen. The failure to finish off mirrors Hamm's own.

The "climax" of the "chronicle", then, is an impasse. Hamm wants to end, wants to destroy all the springs of creativity within himself, yet he cannot because there is always a part of him which wants to survive, hesitating to end. Creativity is a hated necessity. Nonetheless the climax of the "chronicle" does not exactly disappear; rather it is displaced. Hamm cannot deny the symbolic potency of his own invented small boy, but when Clov seems to be inventing the identical symbol for his master's benefit, Hamm finally feels that he can give up. The original (and in this episode much longer) French text provides the definitive link between the boy in Hamm's story and the boy Clov sees out of the window near the end. In the "chronicle" Hamm's vassal speaks of "My little boy, he said, as if the sex mattered" (p.36); and in the French text when Clov spots the child ("C'est quelqu'un!") Hamm asks "Sexe?" - "Quelle importance?"²² retorts Clov. (The varying concern with sex is another example of the way fictional persona differs from the hesitating Hamm on the stage.) For Hamm to reject Clov's small boy outside the refuge is for him to reject the putative inventor. If we take the "chronicle" to be partially true the most obvious implication is

that the small boy at "Kov" is a fictional version of Clov. The rest of the play hints as much :

- Hamm : Do you remember when you came here?
Clov : No. Too small, you told me.
Hamm : Do you remember your father?
Clov : (wearily). Same answer. (Pause.) You've asked me these questions millions of times.

Hamm : I love the old questions. (With fervour.) Ah the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them! (Pause.) It was I was a father to you.
Clov : Yes. (He looks at Hamm fixedly.) You were that to me.
Hamm : My house a home for you.
Clov : Yes. (He looks about him.) This was that for me. (p.29)

And again when Hamm summarises the "chronicle" for Clov :

- Hamm : Crawling on his belly, whining for bread for his brat. He's offered a job as gardener. Before - (Clov bursts out laughing.) What is there so funny about that?

Clov : A job as a gardener?
Hamm : Is that what tickles you?
Clov : It must be that.
Hamm : It wouldn't be the bread?
Clov : Or the brat. (p.40)

Clov is the living presence of the small-boy symbol. When Hamm tells him "I don't need you anymore," he is symbolically disclaiming creativity.

But of course Hamm's disclaiming, like everything else at the end of the play, is ambiguous. He takes up the "chronicle" again momentarily in his final soliloquy, but still nothing is resolved, except perhaps the elements of the story :

(...Narrative tone.) If he could have his child with him...(Pause.) It was the moment I was waiting for. (Pause.) You don't want to abandon him? You want him to bloom while you are withering? Be there to solace your last million last moments? (Pause.)

He doesn't realise, all he knows is hunger, and cold, and death to crown it all. But you! You ought to know what the earth is like nowadays. Oh, I put him before his responsibilities! (Pause. Normal tone.) Well, there we are, there I am, that is enough. (p.52)

There he is indeed. And there is Clov, "impassive and motionless, his eyes fixed on Hamm, till the end". The way the text mirrors the stage-situation is now clearer than ever. The characters seem almost to merge into their fictions, Hamm into the vassal, Clov into the small boy: Hamm withering and Clov solacing his "father's" last million last moments. The "chronicle" can now be seen for what it always was: an expanded image of Hamm's own creative situation.

"But if the occasion appears as an unstable term of relation, the artist, who is the other term, is hardly less so, thanks to his warren of modes and attitudes." This, from Three Dialogues, might be a gloss on Hamm, than whom no Beckett character, unless it be Winnie in Happy Days, has a more extensive and thoroughly explored warren of modes and attitudes. Hugh Kenner, in a review of Ends and Odds (1977), maintains that Beckett's plays

work by locating the most lyrical or the most outrageous sentiment firmly within the compass of an alien voice - the kind of thing he says - and then letting the voice multiply voices, create more characters, till the voice we first heard seems but another creation and the sentiment is dispersed by a wilderness of mirrors. "Can there be misery...loftier than mine?" That was Hamm, hamming, and later Hamm becomes the fantasist of a dreadful tale in which peasants (sic) crawl toward him on their bellies. Then wasn't the Hamm we first heard a fantasy too? His own? Whose? 23

To put it another way, Hamm himself is not a "stable term". He produces his images and fantasies because he has to create himself. For him, as for every other Beckett character creativity is an ontological imperative. The rather vague "void" of Godot has become the more potently concrete "outside" of Endgame ("Outside of here it's death") and it is from this "outside" that Hamm's creations serve as refuge. Even more obviously

than any of the characters in Godot (save perhaps his immediate ancestor Pozzo), Hamm is a parody presence, a "provisional being", made up of his "stiff toque" and whistle, his dressing-gown and veronica, his physical position "more or less" "roughly" "right in the centre" of the stage, and above all his various "modes and attitudes", which are, as his name suggests, those of the Actor, "a creature all circumference and no center".²⁴ The "presence" of this antiquated tragic hero at the centre of his "world" serves to insist upon the presence of acting at the centre of Beckett's drama.

Chapter Three: ALL THAT FALL

Written July - September 1956; first broadcast 13 January 1957.

With All That Fall, written at the same time as Endgame - perhaps as a relaxation from the larger play - but broadcast before Endgame was first performed, Beckett turned to a new medium. No-one has described better than Hugh Kenner how the nature of radio relates to the Beckettian preoccupations. The characters of the radio play, writes Kenner, "are the beings created by the loudspeaker, creating themselves instant by instant and vanishing when they fall silent. "Do not imagine", says Mrs. Rooney after four other voices have intervened in the twenty seconds since her last speech, "do not imagine, because I am silent, that I am not present, and alive, to all that is going on". This is not simply Mrs. Rooney asserting her grievance, but radio drama asserting its nature, and Beckett turned to radio drama at a crest of preoccupation with the fact that for him to live was to make stories, creating with words beings not himself, but perfecting his own identity in perfecting their words".¹ To place the sentence quoted by Kenner in its dramatic context is to underline how Mrs Rooney needs to create, on behalf of her creator, not just herself, but also her surroundings :

Mrs. Rooney : Do not imagine, because I am silent,
that I am not present, and alive, to
all that is going on.

Mr. Tyler : (to Miss Fitt). When you say the last train -

Mrs. Rooney : Do not flatter yourselves for one moment,
because I hold aloof, that my sufferings
have ceased. No. The entire scene, the
hills, the plain, the race-course with its
miles and miles of white rails and three red
stands, the pretty little wayside station,
even you yourselves, yes, I mean it, and over
all the clouding blue, I see it all, I stand
here and see it all with eyes...(the voice
breaks)...through eyes...oh if you had my

eyes...you would understand...the things
they have seen...and not looked away...this
is nothing...nothing...what did I do with
that handkerchief? (Pause.) (pp.23-4)

"This is nothing" indeed, for when, as here, the perceiving subject and the perceived object, Mrs. Rooney and the landscape, are dependent upon each other for their very existence, the whole scene might only be a tissue of fiction - "nothing" real. Even the syntax of the speech, the way the accumulating elements of the landscape all depend upon an assurance by Mrs. Rooney which fragments and then dissolves, conveys the essential ambiguity. And we, the radio listeners, need that assurance, for we, like Dan Rooney, can see nothing.

Maddy Rooney is a controlling consciousness in the play because she is the central creating consciousness (though perhaps not the only one). Rather than commenting on them, it is she who, in effect, calls up the "natural sounds" :

All is still. No living soul in sight. There is no one to ask. The world is feeding. The wind - (brief wind) - scarcely stirs the leaves and the birds - (brief chirp) - are tired singing. The cows - (brief moo) - and sheep - (brief baa) - ruminate in silence. The dogs - (brief bark) - are hushed and the hens - (brief cackle) - sprawl torpid in the dust. We are alone. There is no one to ask.

Silence. (p.32)

The effect of even this single short "speech", with its cyclic form and its recitation of noises, is fundamentally musical. Compare the very first noises we hear in the play: "Rural sounds. Sheep, bird, cow, cock, severally, then together./Silence." As the editors of A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett note, "these sounds, the instructions for which were not strictly adhered to in the first production, are rather like the sounds of an orchestra tuning up".² It is apt, then, that a

few seconds later we should hear "music faint from house by way.

"Death and the Maiden"." (p.7). As always in Beckett, the "musicality" is inseparable from a sharp stylisation of the dramatic elements of the particular medium, both characteristics serving to indicate the created-ness of the artefact.

As Maddy so deftly reminds us (by insisting that it is not necessarily so), to exist on radio means to make sounds, characters are "creating themselves instant by instant and vanishing when they fall silent".

All That Fall is a play which involves characters travelling from one place to another - to and from the station on foot or by train - so that to "fall silent" in this aural environment is to cease moving :

Silence.

Mrs. Rooney : Why do you halt? (Pause.) But why do I halt?

Silence. (p.7)

Dan Rooney, so parsimonious about the money Maddy has to give the boy Jerry who on this occasion is not needed to meet the blind man, is equally stingy with the sounds he has to make. Why waste money? Why waste sound?

Mrs. Rooney : We could have saved sixpence. We have saved fivepence. (Pause.) But at what cost?

They move off along platform arm in arm.
Dragging feet, panting, thudding stick.

Mrs. Rooney : Are you not well?

They halt, on Mr. Rooney's initiative.

Mr. Rooney : Once and for all, do not ask me to speak and move at the same time. I shall not say this in this life again. (p.28)

The Rooneys have to keep going to maintain the sounds of moving. ("But why do we not sit down somewhere? Are we afraid we should never rise again", p.32.), she with her "dragging feet" and he with his thumping

stick and incessant panting. Moving - or speaking: the two are complementary kinds of noise: "Why do you stop? Do you want to say something?" (p.38) Stopping might result in minor disaster, as it does for Mr. Tyler, the back tyre of whose bicycle goes down: "Now if it were the front I should not so much mind. But the back. The back! The chain! The oil! The grease! The hub! The brakes! The gear! No! It is too much!...Would I had shot by you, without a word." (p.11). But in the last resort it is "a word" which is needed to confirm existence of some sort. Mrs. Rooney complains at Mr. Tyler for stealing up behind her on his bicycle; "I rang my bell Mrs. Rooney," he informs her "playfully", "the moment I sighted you I started tinkling my bell, now don't you deny it". "Your bell is one thing, Mr. Tyler" Maddy retorts, "and you are another". (p.10). Words are the thing for the rational animal.

And yet of what value are words to these people? "I speak", says Mr. Rooney, " - and you listen to the wind".

Mrs. Rooney : No no, I am agog, tell me all, then we shall press on and never pause, never pause, till we come safe to heaven.

Pause.

Mr. Rooney : Never pause...safe to heaven...Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language.

Mrs. Rooney : Yes, indeed, Dan, I know full well what you mean, I often have that feeling, it is unspeakably excruciating.

Mr. Rooney : I confess I have it sometimes myself, when I happen to overhear what I am saying.

Mrs. Rooney : Well, you know, it will be dead in time, just like our own poor dear Gaelic, there is that to be said.

Urgent baa.

Mr. Rooney : (startled). Good God!

Mrs. Rooney : Oh the pretty little woolly lamb, crying
to suck its mother! Theirs has not
changed, since Arcady.

Pause.

Mr. Rooney : Where was I in my composition?

Mrs. Rooney : At a standstill.

Mr. Rooney : Ah yes. (p.35)

Donald Davie observes that "the very expression by which Mrs. Rooney admits herself at the mercy of clichés, is itself a cliché. And in this state, the language can express the speaker only by betraying him."³ All language can manage is self-parody, the unwitting revelation of its own fictions, as in the two words which, significantly, buttress the talk of dead language, "haven" and "Arcady". Both are images Maddy invokes (out of two different mythologies, Christian and Greek) to express the yearning of the ever-travelling Rooneys for a final static existence, out of time and out of human mind (the lamb). This is the ideal home, without "the horrors of home life" so exuberantly enumerated by Dan in his "composition" (p.34), the domicile he can only dream of : "I dream of other roads, in other lands. Of another home, another - (he hesitates) - another home. (Pause.) What was I trying to say?" (pp.32-3) Well may he ask. The whole play is an attempt by the Rooneys to "say" properly, but all either of them can manage is an elegance which is in Davie's words, "a parody of all stylistic elegance whatever, insinuating the suspicion that all elegances of language, which seem so superbly to articulate experience, in fact articulate nothing but themselves" : "it is unspeakably excruciating".

Linguistic creativity fails because it cannot achieve the "haven" of a timeless "Arcady", because it can only provide dead images for the stasis which would end all movement, all noise. The demand being made

of language is that it should consummate itself in silence and thus end the need for creativity. Little wonder, therefore, that it should be conceived of as "dead", though of course it does maintain some kind of existence. Just so the characters who use it. "Thus", writes Hugh Kenner, "the mode in which the play itself exists, as a series of auditory effects in time, sustains its theme of transience".⁴ But can the theme of the play be limited simply to "transience"? Certainly this is an obvious concern : there is the "lingering dissolution" of which Maddy speaks (p.11); the "Death and the Maiden" musical motif; the "rotting leaves in June"; "from last year, and from the year before last, and from the year before that again" (p.37), and the hen which Mr. Slocum runs over in his car : "What a death! One minute picking happy at the dung on the road, in the sun, with now and then a dust bath, and then - bang! - all her troubles over." (pp.15-16). All, indeed, that falls and is still falling in the play. But transience is only a part, a consequence perhaps, of something larger which is described precisely and with great deliberation when Maddy recalls "attending a lecture by one of these new mind doctors" ("the name will come back to me in the night") :

Mrs. Rooney : I remember his telling us the story of a little girl, very strange and unhappy in her ways, and how he treated her unsuccessfully over a period of years and was finally obliged to give up the case. He could find nothing wrong with her, he said. The only thing wrong with her as far as he could see was that she was dying. And she did in fact die, shortly after he washed his hands of her.

Mr. Rooney : Well? What is there so wonderful about that?

Mrs. Rooney : No, it was just something he said, and the way he said it, that have haunted me ever since.

Mr. Rooney : You lie awake at night, tossing to and fro and brooding on it.

Mrs. Rooney : On it and other...wretchedness.
(Pause.) When he had done with
the little girl he stood there
motionless for sometime, quite two
minutes I should say, looking down
at his table. Then he suddenly
raised his head and exclaimed, as if
he had had a revelation, The trouble
with her was she had never been really
born! (Pause.) He spoke throughout
without notes. (Pause.) I left before
the end. (pp. 36-7)

Maddy's psychoanalyst lecturer moves by way of his "revelation" from
the "diagnosis" of transience ("she was dying") to the notion of an
imperfect birth - something which is obviously close to, if not
underlying, the "difficult birth" "astride of a grave" in Godot.

Maddy's way of telling points up the idea : he "washed his hands of
her" as a doctor or midwife might; Maddy herself, Dan suggests, "broods"
on the matter (like the hen who was run over by Mr Slocum); and she
"left before the end", because nothing is perfect enough in the world
of the play even to end properly. Everything has to go on because it is
so imperfectly made, "never...really born". The only pure beings are
"the pretty little woolly lamb" of Arcady and a donkey : "(Silence. A
donkey brays. Silence.) That was a true donkey. Its father and mother
were donkeys". (p.29). In both cases the (fictional) authenticity of
being is attested by the mention of parents (the lamb is "crying to suck
its mother") : these animals at least have been fully fathered and fully
mothered, unlike, for example, the boy Jerry :

Mrs. Rooney : How is your poor father?

Jerry : They took him away, Ma'am. (p.27)

The play's falling is a falling out of the womb; as in the Godot image,
the moment of release from the womb, the moment of real birth, is also
the moment of death : "Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger
puts on the forceps." This is what happens to the little child in

All That Falls who, for whatever reason, falls to its death under the wheels of the train. It is born into death.

The idea of the life-long imperfect birth which underlies the play's preoccupation with transience serves as a focus for the most important nexus of leitmotifs. Indeed the whole play can be seen in this way as an extended metaphor for the imperfect birth. Its story (such as it is), together with the topography of the scene and the state of the weather, enacts an attempt to keep "up" in the face of an increasing urge to fall down. This enactment, the fruit of a typically self-conscious Beckettian dualism, is most easily traced by way of the recurring words "Up" (I have counted 42 occurrences) and "down" (28 occurrences) and related phrases to do with rising and falling.

Told in these terms the story goes thus - "up" dominates the first half, Maddy's journey to and vigil at Boghill station: Maddy Rooney (Ma Ruin-y; née Dunne, that is, her birth did for her), travelling to the station, hears a record played by the "poor woman" who is "all alone in that ruinous old house". (p.7. "Ruinous" from latin ruina, meaning "fall". The line was originally : "All alone in that old crazy house".⁵ Beckett's alteration, typical in its meticulousness, assures us of his linguistic "plotting".) She meets Christy the carter, wonders if the nice weather will "hold up" (p.7), thinks she hears the "up mail" (p.7) and asks why Christy does not climb up on top of the dung on his cart. After he leaves, she is overtaken by Mr. Tyler, "a retired bill-broker", who wobbles on his bicycle and does not salute her because he does not want to fall off. However, he is forced to "alight" as Connolly's van thunders past, and in doing so discovers that his "back tyre has gone down again" (p.11). He then recalls saving the lay preacher Hardy's life in a climbing accident, whilst he and Mrs. Rooney let "this vile dust [from Connolly's van] fall back upon the viler worms" (p.11) and

upon themselves. When Mr. Tyler leaves, Mr. Slocum, Clerk of the Course and an "old admirer" (p.13) of Maddy's drives up in his car. He offers her a lift and with enormous effort she gets up into the car (which, with "these new balloon tyres", is rather high off the ground). When they arrive at the station she expends a similar effort in getting down, helped by the boy Tommy. Mr. Barrell the station master is glad to see Maddy "up and about again" after being "laid up,...a long time". (p.17). She requests "the dark Miss. Fitt" (p.20) to help her "up the face of this cliff" (p.21) to the platform itself - by the right arm, for Maddy is "left-handed on top of everything else" (p.21). She wonders if Miss. Fitt has ever been "up the Matterhorn,...great honeymoon resort" (p.22). Meanwhile the weather is turning: "Soon the rain will begin to fall and go on falling, all afternoon (...)...the setting sun will shine an instant, then sink, behind the hills" (p.19). Mr. Tyler remarks when Mr. Barrell gives Tommy a backhander : "That is a nice way to treat your defenceless subordinates, Mr. Barrell, hitting them without warning in the pit of the stomach" (p.22, my emphases). The waiters "move a little up the platform" (p.25). The turning point comes with Tommy's cry "She's coming (...) She's at the level crossing" (p.26). In a crescendo of noise the Up mail passes and recedes and the "down train" pulls up at the station. This is the train Dan Rooney (Down Ruin-y; Da) is on. From hereonin things begin to move insistently "down". "Soon the first great drops of rain will fall slashing in the dust" (p.28). "We shall fall into the ditch" opines Dan as they go down the "precipice" of steps (p.28. This is the "cliff" over which Maddy had trouble - echoing the Matterhorn detail and Hardy's climbing accident). "We are down", Maddy finally assures him, "and little the worse" (p.29). They get up onto a path which gives them a "straight run" (p.30), thus allaying fears that Dan might fall on his wound. They drag and pant and thump on until Dan wants to sit down on a bench or "sink down upon a bank" (p.32).

However, "up" asserts itself in Dan's narrative (or "composition" or "relation") when he recalls how something "Welled up" inside him until he got up and paced to and fro between the seats of the static train (p.36). Maddy's psychoanalyst gives up the little girl but has his "revelation" when he looks down at his table. When Maddy claims that the falling sparrows "weren't sparrows at all" Dan retorts "does that put our price up?" (p.38) Then comes the preacher Hardy's (and the play's) text: "The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed" (p.39). And finally the coda in which Jerry tells the couple of the little child that "fell out of the carriage...(...) On the line...(...) Under the wheels' of the train (p.41).

How, then, in the light of this perspective on the story, does the play become an extended metaphor for the imperfect birth? There are two parody births in the play. The first is Maddy's, as she gets out of Mr. Slocum's car : "Crouch down, Mrs. Rooney, crouch down, and get your head in the open" (p.16). It follows her obvious parody intercourse with Mr. Slocum (pun intended) as she gets in: "I'm coming, Mrs. Rooney, I'm coming, give me time, I'm as stiff as yourself" "Stiff! Well I like that! And me heaving all over back and front.(...) The dry old reprobate!" (p.14) The second one, far more important in terms of structure, is Dan's. He emerges onto the platform just after the Up mail (pun intended again) meets the down train (which, incidentally, "pulls up with great hissing of steam and clashing of couplings"!), getting down from the latter. He then goes "in the men's" (p.27) and when he comes out Maddy tells him that she has come to meet him "to give him s surprise. For your birthday" (p.27). Dan does not remember, but Maddy says she gave him a tie for a present: "You have it on!" (p.27, Now he is tied to life.) Up to the announcement of the birth-day things had "held-up", if tenuously. Now they start pressing down. "Is anything the matter", Maddy asks Mr. Barrell just after the train has arrived, "you look as if

you had seen a ghost" (p.26). Dan is indeed the ghost of a real being. His parody imperfect-birth precipitates the play's falling.

Dan's own narrative "composition" reinforces the idea of a metaphorical birth from the train. In the train, he tells Maddy, he thought he might "retire from business, it has retired from [him]" (p.33). But then he thinks of "the horrors of home life", which are horrible not least because they are continuous processes; nothing is ever finished - it is a present participle world: "the dusting, sweeping, airing, scrubbing, waxing, waning, washing, mangling, drying, mowing, clipping, raking, rolling, scuffling, shovelling, grinding, tearing, pounding, banging and slamming." (p.34. "waning", there because of the pun on "waxing", is an odd man out, but is obviously an apt addition.) In contrast, his office offers the nearest possible equivalent to a womb-like stasis: "And I fell to thinking of my silent, backstreet, basement office with its obliterated plate [no identity], rest-couch and velvet hangings, and what it means to be buried there alive, if only from ten to five, with convenient to one hand a bottle of light pale ale and to the other a long ice-cold fillet of hake. Nothing, I said, not even fully certified death, can ever take the place of that." (p.34.) However, the impending "birth" is heralded by what is apparently a touch of bladder distress (the unsymbolic reason for his visiting "the men's" as soon as he alights). But Dan's self-censorship leaves the account appropriately suggestive:

I did not care what was amiss. No, I just sat on, saying, If this train were never to move again I should not greatly mind. Then gradually a - how shall I say - a growing desire to - er - you know - welled up within me. Nervous probably. In fact now I am sure. You know, the feeling of being confined... If we sit here much longer, I said, I really do not know what I shall do. I got up and paced to and fro between the seats, like a caged beast. (p.36)

Maddy's punctuating comment is likewise drolly suggestive: "Yes yes, I have been through that."

Dan's relation is greeted with silence. "Say something, Maddy", he urges, "say you believe me". (p.36.) As the end of the play hints, he may have his own, moral, reasons, for desiring a positive response. He wants his audience to believe that his narration is the truth, and yet everything about it, from his deliberate "narrative tone" to his referring to it as his "composition", suggests that it is a fiction, a metaphorical recreation of his own "birth". And Maddy, of course, has her self to invent: her fictions, though less obtrusive, are no less important to her existence. "Words, similarly, create the ephemerally substantial Mrs. Rooney herself", asserts Kenner, and nowhere more than in the images of Maddy's physical appearance are we aware of the onerousness of the burden on language in the radiophonic medium. We have to rely on words, and words alone, for our notion of appearance. Most of Maddy's linguistic self-renderings are splendidly comical. "Sometimes", notes Ronald Hayman, "the dialogue makes her seem like an object".⁶ He quotes a passage from Watt about Watt:

Tetty was not sure whether it was a man or a woman. Mr Hackett was not sure that it was not a parcel, a carpet for example, or a roll of tarpaulin, wrapped up in dark paper and tied about the middle with a cord. ⁷

As Hayman observes, one of Mr. Hackett's hypotheses comes up again in All That Fall: "Thank you, Miss Fitt, thank you", says Maddy, "that will do, just prop me up against the wall like a roll of tarpaulin and that will be all, for the moment". (p.23). The simile is typical of Maddy's way of referring to herself. Earlier she exclaims: "Oh let me just flop down flat on the road like a big fat jelly out of a bowl and

never move again! A great big slop thick with grit and dust and flies, they would have to scoop me up with a shovel." (p.9). That is Maddy as pile of dung (for Christy's cart). There is also Maddy as a "bale", being heaved into Mr. Slocum's car (p.14); Maddy as board: "Would I were lying stretched out in my comfortable bed...you wouldn't see me under the blankets any more than a board" (p.18). She asks Miss Fitt: "Is this cretonne so becoming to me that I merge into the masonry? (...). That is right, Miss Fitt, look closely and you will finally distinguish a once female shape" (p.19). Miss Fitt explains:

Miss Fitt : All I saw was a big pale blur, just another big pale blur. (Pause.) Is anything amiss, Mrs. Rooney, you do not look normal somehow. So bowed and bent.

Mrs.Rooney : (ruefully). Maddy Rooney, née Dunne, the big blur. (Pause.) You have piercing sight, Miss Fitt, if you only knew it, literally piercing.

(pp.20-21).

Dan's comments are hardly gallant: "You are quivering like a blanc-mange" (p.28); "Two hundred pounds of unhealthy fat! What possessed you to come out at all?" (p.30). "Don't mind me", protests Maddy at the station, "don't take any notice of me. I do not exist. The fact is well known" (p.16). The "religionist" Miss Fitt might say the same. She is "just a bag of bones" who needs "building up", and she herself admits: "I suppose the truth is I am not there, Mrs. Rooney, just not really there at all. I see, hear, smell, and so on, I go through the usual motions, but my heart is not in it, Mrs. Rooney, but heart is in none of it. Left to myself, with no one to check me, I would soon be flown...home" [the "haven" again] (p.20). She has a strange exchange with Mr. Barrell (whose name provides an image, orotund and hollow, of his physical appearance!) :

Miss Fitt : Has anybody seen my mother?

Mr.Barrell : Who is that?

Tommy : The dark Miss Fitt.

Mr.Barrell: Where is her face? (p.23).

This parallels another exchange between Maddy and Mr. Tyler. Maddy might be speaking for all the characters :

Mr. Tyler : What sky! What light! Ah in spite of all it is a blessed thing to be alive in such weather, and out of hospital.

Mrs.Rooney : Alive?

Mr. Tyler : Well half alive shall we say?

Mrs.Rooney : Speak for yourself, Mr. Tyler. I am not half alive nor anything approaching it.

(pp.11-12).

This points up with a delightful comic touch the relation between being in any measure "alive" and "speaking for yourself" on radio. "Shall we say?...Speak for yourself": that is the only way they can exist, and then only as comic grotesqueries, semi-objects. By loading the play so heavily with grotesque similes - Maddy is always like this or like that - Beckett reminds us forcibly that language is metaphorical by nature - for what is simile if not "unpacked" metaphor? The word can only image the thing; it can never be the thing (even the word "word" reduces by visual codification a mysterious aural phenomenon). Thus to live solely in language, as those people ("There is nothing to be done for those people", p.37) in the play do, is to live perpetually at one remove from identity. The very end of All That Fall is puzzling, nevertheless it does provide a paradigm for this pervasive simile-mode, for the thing young Jerry returns to Dan Rooney "looks like a kind of ball. And yet it is not a ball" (p.40). Just as Maddy looks like "a big pale blur" to Miss Fitt. Yet in what way does she really exist?

Continuous self-creation - making sound from moment to moment - is the only means of survival in the world of the radio play. And yet survival

without being fully or even half alive, without ever having been really born, is a hated thing. It is not surprising, therefore, that there should be a strong current of anti-fertility, of willed infertility, in the play. Mrs. Rooney refuses the fertilizer offered by Christy: "Dung? What would we want with dung, at our time of life?" (p.8). "Damn the mail" exclaims Christy himself (p.8), with a crashing pun. Even the flower Maddy notices is labour-numb (laburnum, p.9); Mr. Tyler's daughter has had a hysterectomy: "They removed everything, you know, the whole...er...bag of tricks. Now I am grandchildless" (p.10); Mrs. Rooney rejects what she believes to be his advances; he in turn curses "under my breath, God and man, under my breath, and the wet Saturday afternoon of my conception" (p.11). Maddy advises him in a not-very-subtle innuendo, not to "ride her [his bicycle] flat! (...) You'll tear your tube to ribbons!" (p.13). Even Mr. Slocum's engine comes over as a human thing being put down: "All morning she went like a dream and now she is dead...(...) Perhaps if I were to choke her (...) She was getting too much air! (p.15); and when he does get going he runs over a hen - "all the laying and hatching" is now done with: "They would have slit her weasand in any case" (p.16). At the station Maddy waxes enthusiastic at the possibility of a collision (p.25) and, on the way home, Dan's "wish to kill a child (...) Nip some young doom in the bud" (p.31) presages the end of the play, where the theme reaches a climax. In the light of these accumulated details David J. Alpaugh's argument seems valid :

The characters are involved in an attempt to discreate a universe that was so ill-created long ago. This discreation proceeds through the death of children and the removal of sexual organs. In this respect Schubert's "Death and the Maiden", played twice during the play, refers to all the maidens in the drama - to Mrs. Rooney, Minnie, Tyler's daughter, the little girl examined by the doctor, and to the small child who fell out of the train - for this is a play concerned with the death of fertility; the play becomes an anti-

fertility ritual, bringing Western drama
to a sardonic end.⁸

And yet Alpaugh's claim, as well as being far too large (why does All That Fall bring Western drama to an end?), is so over-emphatic as to involve a distortion. It simplifies the play, making it seem far less subtle and honest than it in fact is. "A play concerned with the death of fertility" is playing false if it is not also concerned with the life that is possible through fertility, for it will deny the creativity of which the play itself is proof. The piece must not be oblivious to its own fertility and resource, for "discreation" becomes merely a luxury when creation is not also at issue: the play itself is a fertile act. All That Fall acknowledges this, and acknowledges it movingly, in the Rooneys need for each other's companionship. Just as it takes man and woman for sexual creativity, so it takes Dan and Maddy for ontological creativity. At the climax of the play they cling to each other and Dan weeps, perhaps for the old woman who cannot cling - just as Maddy had wept for "those people", the ones who have "never been really born" :

Mrs. Rooney : We shall hang up all our things in the hotcupboard and get into our dressing-gowns. (Pause.) Put your arm round me. (Pause.) Be nice to me! (Pause. Gratefully.) Ah Dan! (They move on. Wind and rain. Dragging feet, etc. Faintly same music as before. They halt. Music clearer. Silence but for music playing. Music dies.) All day the same old record. All alone in that great empty house. She must be a very old woman now.

Mr. Rooney : (indistinctly). Death and the Maiden.
Silence.

Mrs. Rooney : You are crying. (Pause.) Are you crying?

Mr. Rooney : (violently). Yes! (They move on.
Wind and rain. Dragging feet, etc.
They halt. They move on. Wind and
rain. Dragging feet, etc. They halt.)

Or perhaps Dan weeps over the event with which the play's enigmatic coda is concerned, the death of the little child on the line which held up the train. It is the coda which focuses, though mysteriously, the play's essentially ambivalent attitude towards creativity, the attitude which is suggested by Dan's guess at tomorrow's sermon text, "How to be Happy though Married", followed by Maddy's "Hold me tighter, Dan! (...) Oh yes!" (p.39). As in Godot and Endgame, the connection is a curse, but it is necessary for survival.

In the coda Jerry comes running up to return to Dan something he dropped. "It looks like a kind of ball. And yet it is not a ball." Dan acknowledges it grudgingly and becomes violent. "It is a thing I carry about with me!" he shouts. As Jerry leaves Maddy asks him "what kept the train so late". "It was a little child fell out of the carriage, Ma'am," he answers, "on to the line, Ma'am (...) Under the wheels, Ma'am." And as the Rooneys move on we hear a "tempest of wind and rain" (p.41). The problem is to do with symbols. The little child works well as a symbol of creativity, a creativity which Dan apparently "nipped in the bud". ("Did you ever wish to kill a child?" he asks Maddy, p.31). Children are intimately connected with creativity throughout the play. But the "kind of ball" which Dan carries around with him, and which Jerry returns, ultimately fails as a symbol because of a deliberate mystification by Beckett on the level of the story. This "ball" may be a symbol, but what is it on the simple literal level? Perhaps for the only time, in the plays at least, Beckett is guilty here of the wilful mystification of which he is sometimes accused. The "ball", it has been suggested, is an egg or a testicle (neither of which work on a literal level). At any rate it seems to

represent a creativity which Dan attempts to deny being forced back on him. He is alienated from it but he cannot get rid of it, even in the murder of the child (which is, one must remember, not just a symbolic fact). If this interpretation is accepted, the coda of All That Fall can be seen to encapsulate the role of creativity in the play: it is a hated necessity, continually denied in acts of willed infertility and even murder, but always necessary, however odious, for the purposes of survival. For these people, "never really born" though they are, cannot let go of their ghostly existences. They are, like their creator, obliged to create. The simple denial of creativity would be a luxury, one which All That Fall, despite the failure of the symbolism at the last gasp, does not indulge.

Transience may be, as Kenner suggests, the very essence of the radiophonic medium, but All That Fall would not be as complex as it is if it were simply about transience. As in all his plays, Beckett goes further. For him transience is only one aspect (though for the majority of people it is by far the most acutely felt aspect) of the larger predicament of individual human identity. He writes out of a sense not merely of passing on, but of never being properly there in the first place - the image of imperfect birth underlines this. What All That Fall, like the other plays, presents us with is not human presences decaying and falling but parody presences, results of a continuous but imperfect self-creation which, though always aspiring towards the pure unself-conscious being which is imaged in the "true donkey" and the Arcadian lamb, can never attain it. We are confronted with a parody world in which birds chirp, cows moo, sheep baa, dogs bark and hens cackle all strictly to order and on cue, and in which the characters envisage themselves, if at all, as bags of bones, barrels, ghosts, dungheaps, masonry, big pale blurs, roles of

tarpaulin, blancmanges, unhealthy fat, and so on. Because of its failure to achieve silence language itself becomes a parody. Informing the parody is the omnipresent obligation of creativity; each successive sound passes on, the obligation remains.

Chapter Four: KRAPP'S LAST TAPE

Begun 20 February 1958 ; first performed 28 October 1958¹.

Endgame is not just a play which has a symbolic structure but a play about "symbolic structure", its nature and purpose. The characteristic Beckettian consternation behind the form consists in the revelation of what we might think of as the play's symbolic structure to be perhaps (that is always the crucial word when dealing with the Beckettian ambiguity, as the author himself has remarked) the invention of the characters. The symbolic structure is thus subject to a continual sense of uncertainty and unease, the source of which is to be located in the attitude towards the ultimate symbolic structure, the substance of the endgame, language itself.

There is I think considerable point in initiating the discussion of Krapp's Last Tape with these remarks. On the face of it no other play in the oeuvre is less like Endgame than this one. Indeed Krapp seems the odd man out in several ways. It feels, to begin with, much simpler: its focus appears to be moral rather than ontological and its dramatic method a good deal less self-conscious than anything else in Beckett. With the possible exception of Godot, it is surely the most readily accessible of the plays. This much is fairly clear and straight-forward. However in the present context we need to consider not what distinguishes this play from all the others - that is obvious enough - but what it shares with them in the way of dramatic method and concern. The most convenient starting point is again symbolic structure and the issues surrounding it. Let us turn immediately to one of the richest and most interesting passages.

Every year on his birthday Krapp makes a ritual of recording his

reflections on the past year and listening to tapes of years past.

"Separating the grain from the husks", he calls it: "I suppose I mean those things worth having when all the dust has - when all my dust has settled. I close my eyes and try to imagine them."²

On his sixty-ninth birthday he is listening to a tape he made thirty years ago which is indexed in his ledger as "Mother at rest at last... The black ball...The dark nurse" (p.11). ("This reading", it has been noted, "is...like a musical announcement of themes, recapitulations and developments, in the tape that Krapp and the listener will hear".³ - similar to the introduction of the "Sirens" chapter of Ulysses.) "There is of course the house on the canal where mother lay a-dying, in the autumn, after her long viduity [State - or condition - of being - or remaining - a widow - or widower...] and the

- bench by the weir from where I could see her window. There I sat, in the biting wind, wishing she were gone. (Pause.) Hardly a soul, just a few regulars, nursemaids, infants, old men, dogs, I got to know them quite well - oh by appearance of course I mean! One dark young beauty I recollect particularly, all white and starch, incomparable bosom, with a big black hooded perambulator, most funereal thing. Whenever I looked in her direction she had her eyes on me. And yet when I was bold enough to speak to her - not having been introduced - she threatened to call a policeman. As if I had designs on her virtue! (Laugh. Pause.) The face she had! The eyes! Like...(hesitates)...chrysolite! (Pause.) Ah well...(Pause.) I was there when - (KRAPP switches off, broods, switches on again) - the blind went down, one of those dirty brown roller affairs, throwing a ball for a little white dog as chance would have it. I happened to look up and there it was. All over and done with, at last. I sat on for a few moments with the ball in my hand and the dog yelping and pawing at me. (Pause.) Moments. Her moments, my moments. (Pause.) The dog's moments. (Pause.) In the end I held it out to him and he took it in his mouth, gently, gently. A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. (Pause.) I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day. (Pause.) I might have kept it. (Pause.) But I gave it to the dog. (pp. 14-15).

"There is nothing highbrow or abstruse here," writes Alec Reid of this passage, "no symbols or learned allusions, nothing calling for

specialised knowledge of any kind".⁴ The author would seem to disagree. Of the death of Krapp's mother he has written (in a notebook for his own production of the play in Berlin in May 1969) that "if the giving of the black ball to the white dog represents the sacrifice of sense to spirit the form here too is that of a mingling".⁵ "Dogs seem to bring out the pedant in Beckett"⁶ comments Katharine Worth ruefully; nonetheless James Knowlson, who first made use of the author's Berlin Regiebuch notes, has made them the basis of his interpretation of the play. "It is clear," he writes, "that for Krapp the central issue in his life is one of coming to terms with a fundamental dualism, either by attempted separation or reconciliation"⁷:

The black and white imagery that runs through the entire play [and which is particularly in evidence in the passage under consideration] suggests that Krapp's inability, even his unwillingness, to find happiness with a woman arises out of a fundamental attitude towards life as a whole that affects most aspects of his daily living. Krapp is only too ready to associate woman with the darker side of existence and he clearly sees her as appealing to the dark, sensual side of man's nature, distracting him from the cultivation of the understanding and the spirit... The renunciation of love forms part of an ascetic quest that rejects the world as an inferior creation and shrinks away from the material element of the flesh to concentrate upon the spiritual or the pneumatic. Krapp is clearly following here in a Gnostic, even a specifically Manichean tradition, with its abstention from sexual intercourse and marriage (so as not to play the Creator's game), its rift between God and the world, the world and man, the spirit and the flesh, and its vision of the universe, the world and man himself as divided between two opposing principles, the forces of darkness constantly threatening to engulf the forces of light.⁸

The well-lubricated gear-change from personal system to cosmic philosophy is encouraged by Beckett's own terms of discussion; for example :

Krapp decrees physical (ethical) incompatibility of light (Spiritual) and dark (sensual) only when he intuits possibility of their reconciliation as

rational - irrational. He turns from fact
of anti-mind alien to mind to thought of
anti-mind constituent of mind.⁹

It is clear from these examples that Beckett (and Knowlson after him) isolated - if only for the purposes of stage-production - what appears to be the conceptual basis or substructure of the play from its concrete realisation, thus producing what amounts to an anagogical reading of it. The result is as if a skeleton were to appear alive without its flesh. (And Knowlson illustrates how the systematic skeleton can be seen to represent a particular philosophy.)

Beckett's reading of Krapp is the result of a particular attitude towards the play's symbolism. Knowlson reports that Beckett called the recurring images of light and dark and black and white "emblems".¹⁰ His exegetical treatment of the images makes it clear that he defines "emblem" in the same way as D.W.Harding does in making the distinction between "emblem" and "symbol". "The contrast I have in mind," writes Harding,

is, roughly speaking, between a representation that stands for something clearly definable [emblem] and one that stands for something of which the general nature is evident but the precise range and boundaries of meaning are not readily specified, perhaps not usefully specified [symbol].¹¹

For Beckett himself, "the giving of the black ball to the white dog represents the sacrifice of sense to spirit". Yet the critic who specifies the "range and boundaries of meaning in such a rigid way cannot help but limit the natural suggestiveness of what are best regarded to begin with as (in the Harding - symbolist and post-symbolist-sense) symbols. The author's interpretation sacrifices literary sensitivity to exegetical correctness. For example, Krapp remembers the dog "yelping and pawing" at him: not only is the "spirit"

troublesomely insistent, it is a dog as well. His "sense" goes to the dogs. The image suggests his own moral judgement on his great decision: it was a mistake, a pointless gift. He had in the palm of his hand "a small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball" (the significance of solid things is confirmed, as we shall see, in Embers) : it was resilient, palpable; he could grasp it and assure himself that it was not illusory. And yet he gave up this, the life of the body - for the ball is symbolic in particular of sex (as in All That Fall and Happy Days, Beckett enlists for serious purpose what would otherwise be merely a rude joke). He now recognises that he made the wrong decision: "I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day." Hugh Kenner, for whom Krapp is "a man who withheld himself; a man who recalls the dying day of his mother with less feeling than he evokes in himself with the phrase about his own 'dying day'", considers that "the pity" in this line "is self-pity".¹² But where in the first place is the pity? The symbolism of the passage bears the mark of Krapp's awareness of his own failure: he has anticipated Kenner's moralism. The only things which are hard and solid about his life now are the bones of Fanny, the "bony old ghost of a whore" ("Couldn't do much, but I suppose better than a kick in the crutch", p.18), and "the iron stool" (p.18) of "unattainable laxation" (p.13).

An essentially symbolic reading of the passage is therefore necessary. And yet there are moments at which one feels that the notion of emblem might usefully be invoked, though surely not in such a way as to endorse in any meaningful sense the comments of either Knowlson or Beckett himself. The episode with the white dog and the black ball is prefaced by the encounter with the "dark young beauty..., all white and starch... with a big black hooded perambulator, most funereal thing". The insistence on the colour duality certainly seems to indicate that the "meanings" here are after all emblematic, "clearly definable" once we

have gathered the necessary information. The "young beauty" unites "dark" and "white", stiff (starch) and soft (she has an "incomparable bosom"?), white and "black" (the "hooded perambulator"), birth (she is apparently a nurse) and death (her perambulator is a "most funereal thing"). Or at least that is how the conventional commentary would run. Such an interpretation would leave Beckett open to the charge of contrivance, that his use of emblems is so blatant and obtrusive as to be merely clumsy: this stands for life, that for death, and the thing is sown up accordingly. The orthodox critical charge brings to the surface one of the most important elements of the play. "Throwing a ball for a little white dog as chance would have it." Contrivance is exactly the point: "as chance would have it" is not the result of an ironic twitch on the author's part; it is a phrase which betrays his character's consciousness of the way his imagination radically shapes experience in the process of remembering it, so that remembering merges with imagining. It is impossible to tell where the one ends and the other begins. "Separating the grain from the husks," the intellectualising process of the Proustian "voluntary memory", inevitably involves this radical distortion. Again, as in Endgame (this is the result of the dramatic method which, for all their superficial dissimilarities, the two plays share), this does not mean that the symbolic structure of Krapp's Last Tape is invalidated but rather that it is made unstable and ambiguous: there is consternation behind it, since there is no way of knowing what Krapp remembers and what he invents. What does it mean to remember in any case? For a man who seems no longer to have faith - if indeed he ever did - in the Proustian "involuntary memory", "memory" as such is another impossible absolute.

Thus in Krapp, as in Endgame, we are concerned not only with Beckett's use of symbolic structure but also with that of his character. (There is no reason for the Chinese boxes to stop here, since no doubt Krapp-at-39

may be considered an invention of Krapp-at-69, and so on.) Unlike Endgame, however, Krapp does not remorselessly strip itself down to reveal the instability of the symbolic structure of language itself. The later play, though lacking this degree of penetration, has a rather more accommodating, human-seeming focus. The best way to define this focus is to examine Beckett's (and Krapp's) use of one particular symbol. Let us concentrate on one of the major components of the omnipresent light-darkness symbolism: the eye imagery. There are important examples in the passage we have been considering.

"Whenever I looked in her direction she had her eyes on me" says Krapp of his dark young beauty: "The face she had! The eyes! Like...chrysolite!" The other eye in the passage is rather less obvious: " - the blind went down, one of those dirty brown roller affairs...I happened to look up and there it was. All over and done with, at last." "I could see her window" recalls Krapp-at-39, but it is just as important that the window can see him (like the dark young beauty - "she had her eyes on me"). It is not until he is released from the scrutiny of his mother's eye, that is, not until "the blind went down", that he feels himself free to make his symbolic decision about the ball. He knows that these moments, which are hers as no others have ever been, are also his, for he believes - or at least he believed at 39 - that on the dexterity of his decision depends what he calls his "pursuit of happiness". Indeed images of open and closed eyes are consistently associated by Krapp with the "chance of happiness". (In Knowlson's and Beckett's terms these images figure prominently in Krapp's attempts to reconcile "intellectually" "sense" and "spirit".) The "very near-sighted (but unspectacled)" Krapp listens to the thirty-nine year-old's voice recalling how he "sat before the fire with closed eyes, separating the grain from the husks" (pp. 11-12, "those things worth having when all

the dust has...settled"); later the tape records how "suddenly I saw the whole thing. The vision at last" (p.15), (my emphases) as exultant prelude to a now-hollow epiphany: and in his last tape the sixty-nine year-old recalls with poignant ellipsis and cadence: "Scalded the eyes out of me reading Effie again, a page a day, with tears again" (p.18). But the most important and touching passage about eyes and the chance of happiness is the scene in the punt narrated by Krapp-at-thirty-nine :

- upper lake, with the punt, bathed off the bank, then pushed out into the stream and drifted. She lay stretched out on the floorboards with her hands under her head and her eyes closed. Sun blazing down, bit of a breeze, water nice and lively. I noticed a scratch on her thigh and asked her how she came by it. Picking gooseberries, she said. I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on and she agreed, without opening her eyes. (Pause.) I asked her to look at me and after a few moments - (pause) - after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of a glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. (Pause. Low.) Let me in. (Pause.) We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stem! (Pause.) I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, from side to side.

(pp. 16-17).

Pierre Chabert notes that Krapp is renouncing love "to consecrate himself to his work (which is not described, but has to do with writing). But," he continues,

Beckett once said to me, laughing, I thought of writing a play on the opposite situation with Mrs. Krapp, the girl in the punt, nagging away behind him, in which case his failure and his solitude would be exactly the same - which only goes to show how little importance should be given to the plot seen in isolation.¹³

It also goes to show how little importance should be given to the author's own casual comments. Despite its complexities, I think that

the effect of the play depends upon our holding out a belief with Krapp, that he has forgone, it not happiness itself, at least "a chance of happiness", that, in other words, happiness is an available thing. "The character is eaten up by dreams", Beckett told Krapp's German creator Martin Held. "But without sentimentality. There's no resignation in him"¹⁴ (my emphasis). If the play is poignant it is because of Krapp's unresigned sense of lost opportunities - not necessarily of lost happiness, but of vanished possibilities. The irony of the last lines, spoken still by the taped voice of Krapp-at-39 as we look at Krapp-at-69, is as simple as it is rending :

Here I end this reel. Box - (pause) - three, spool - (pause) - five. (Pause.) Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No I wouldn't want them back.

KRAPP motionless staring before him. The tape runs on in silence.

CURTAIN. (p.20)

The only fire left in Krapp now is the "burning to be gone" (p.18). And it is sadly ironic that "reading Effie" [Briest] he should have "scalded the eyes out of me", for it is in the eyes of the girl in the punt that his ideas of creative possibilities focus themselves. "In the love scene," Ruby Cohn has written,

Krapp seeks his own image in the eyes of his beloved. His insistent, "Let me in," is not only sexual in its plea, but metaphysical. If his beloved can let Krapp into her reality, they can achieve that moment of stillness even though "all moved". In the light of that moment, the rest of Krapp's life is a solipsistic "viduity", in which he communes only with himself on a "spool".¹⁵

We cannot know what image Krapp seeks in the eyes of his beloved, but, thirty years later, he tells us what he found :

The eyes she had! (broods, realises he is recording silence, switches off, broods. Finally.) Everything there, everything, all the - (Realises this is not being recorded, switches on.) Everything there, everything on this old muckball, all the light and dark and famine and feasting of... (hesitates)...the ages! (In a shout.) Yes! (Pause.) Let that go! Jesus! Take his mind off his homework! Jesus! (Pause. Weary.) Ah well, maybe he was right. (Pause.) Maybe he was right. (Broods. Realises. Switches off...) (p.18)

Nowhere more than in this enigmatic passage does the poignancy of the last "chance of happiness" make itself felt. A large part of that poignancy consists in the way we are made aware of Krapp's symbolic structuring of his "memories" or past experiences. It is as if the several different women with whom he has had relationships have all merged into one symbolic being. "The eyes she had", though referring to the girl in the punt, echoes the younger Krapp's exclamation about the dark young beauty: "The face she had! The eyes!" And there is "Bianca [white] in Kedar Street" (as Knowlson notes, Kedar means black in Hebrew; and it is an anagram for "darke"), with whom he once lived "on and off": "Well out of that, Jesus yes! Hopeless business. (Pause.) Not much about her apart from a tribute to her eyes. Very warm. I suddenly saw them again. (Pause.) Incomparable!" "Incomparable" is also, we remember, the word he uses to describe the bosom of the dark young beauty. Krapp makes symbols of beautiful eyes: they reveal worlds, lost worlds which he feels might have been kept. When he compares the woman's eyes with chrysolite¹⁶ we sense that not only Beckett but Krapp too is making a pointed (and poignant) allusion. Othello, a black man, says of Desdemona, his white woman, after having murdered her :

If heaven would make me such another world,
Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,
I'd not have sold her for it. (Othello, Viii, 145-7.)

It is as a mirror of the world that Krapp sees the female eye:

"Everything there, everything..." And not just a negative world:

the light is there as well as the dark, the feasting as well as the

famine. This is the unity which Krapp believes he obtained before

his great decision (and which he attempts to regain by "mingling"

opposites, as Beckett and Knowlson maintain). The old Krapp

oscillates between feelings of intense regret and uneasy relief.

Before he realises that his recorder is still switched off, he is

about to continue "everything, all the light and dark...", but,

having switched the machine back on, he abandons, or at least attempts

to abandon, the implicit neutrality of his original construction :

"Everything on this old muckball..." Abusing the earth (the eye too

is perhaps a "muckball") is a way of loading the dice, yet with his

shouted "Yes!" Krapp seems, momentarily, but too late, to accept the

"chance of happiness", in the original, united famine and feasting

of the world. But inevitably his mood subsides and he falls to

brooding again: "Maybe he was right." The crucial decision was made

by someone ("he") whom Krapp feels to be not just a younger version of

himself, but another person; such is his alienation from the youthful decision.

Thus Krapp's "let me in" plea to the girl in the punt is, as Ruby Cohn

notes, more than just physical - though it is surely that too. It is

at the very moment that he decides "it was hopeless and no good going

on" (because she has apparently been with someone else) that he yearns

most for the physical and metaphysical union which is symbolised by

the sex-act. The entry into the girl's body is in fact a major part

of the entry into experience of the world: the love-making both

symbolises and is an element of the acceptance of experience, with

"all the light and dark and famine and feasting of...the ages". By

bending over her and getting her eyes in the shadow Krapp manages to open them ("they opened", as if the girl's eyes were independent of her, which, in the symbolic sense, they are). Yet the climax of the passage is equivocal - in the same way that a sigh is equivocal ("The way they went down, sighing, before the stem!"). The punt gets stuck "among the flags" and even though the punt moves the two of them, they do not move themselves. It is a moment of stasis, of ecstasy even, but for Krapp it is also the beginning of stagnation ("stuck") and an impotence which, if not physical ("How do you manage it,...at your age?" asks his "bony old ghost of a whore" Fanny), is certainly emotional. She did not let him in, and a life which might have been unified is now hopelessly polarised into dreams and sordidⁱty :

Crawled out once or twice, before the summer was cold. Sat shivering in the park, drowned in dreams and burning to be gone. Not a soul. (Pause.) Last fancies. (Vehemently.) Keep 'em under! (Pause.) Scalded the eyes out of me reading Effie again, a page a day, with tears again. Effie...(Pause.) Could have been happy with her, up there on the Baltic, and the pines, and the dunes. (Pause.) Could I? (Pause.) And she? (Pause.) Pah! (Pause.) Fanny came in a couple of times. Bony old ghost of a whore. Couldn't do much, but I suppose better than a kick in the crutch. The last time wasn't so bad. How do you manage it, she said, at your age? I told her I'd been saving up for her all my life. (p.18)

"Crawled...shivering...drowned...burning...Scalded...couple...Bony...kick in the crutch..." If Krapp once, as his author would have it, sacrificed sense to spirit, sense is taking a cruel revenge.

This is how Krapp's own commentary might run. According to his retrospective structuring he made his crucial mistake by choosing the work rather than the life. He ponders the failure of his "opus...magnum" (p.13). "Seventeen copies sold, of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas. Getting known. (Pause.)

One pound six and something, eight I have little doubt" (p.18). All of which indicates that he is not a Harold Robbins or an Alistair MacLean; but he feels his failure to be an aesthetic one as well. As later in Happy Days, artistic proclivities are symbolised by song. But it is important to keep in mind that the symbolism is Krapp's own - his self-consciousness betrays the fact. At thirty-nine he listened to the singing of Miss. McGlome (darkness again), "songs of her girlhood,...Wonderful woman....," and asks himself, "Shall I sing when I am her age if I ever am? No. (Pause.) Did I sing as a boy? No. (Pause.) Did I ever sing? No" (p.12). The act of singing gathers resonance from the older Krapp's cracked song :

Now the day is over,
Night is drawing nigh-igh,
Shadow - (coughing, then almost inaudible)- of the
evening
Steal across the sky. (p.19)

And during the last year he "went to Vespers once, like when I was in short trousers...Went to sleep and fell off the pew" (pp.18-19). Indeed his song cuts across this reminiscence.

The two major episodes of Krapp's Last Tape - the ones we have considered - memorialise what the younger, thirty-nine year old Krapp saw as moments of decision: "Moments. Her moments, my moments...I might have kept it...", "I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on and she agreed..." These are apparently the moments at which he decided to devote his life to art, and his "opus magnum" - or at least he sees them as such in retrospect. But even at thirty-nine he knew he had made a wrong choice, and the play is concerned, as Knowlson and Beckett himself point out, with the attempts of Krapp to create, both on and off tape, symbolic unity out of the bewildering dualities which were born of his mistaken decision: light and darkness; open and shut (the eyes); black and white; past and present; I and he;

Krapp-at-39 and Krapp-at-69 ("wearish old man", p.9, and "stupid bastard", p.17); day and night (the "memorable equinox", p.11); sea and rock (in the "vision", pp.15-16); on and off (the recorder); male and female; being and remaining (see the definition of "viduity", p.14); up and down (the punt); in and out (the girl's eyes).

"I might have kept it...But I gave it to the dog." The suggestion is of an original unity, a unity of self, which the decision caused to be lost. It is at this point that the essential similarity of Krapp to Endgame might be most useful, for the self-consciousness of the play's symbolic structure hints strongly at the possibility that, as in Endgame, the "past" is made up less of remembered facts than of invented structures. This suggestion emerged most strongly in our examination of the episode of the mother's death; it also makes itself felt in the air of contrivance which hangs about Krapp-at-39's account of the love-scene in the punt, with its stage-direction evocation of atmosphere ("Sun blazing down, bit of a breeze, water nice and lively") and its scrupulously wrought linguistic and rhythmic effects ("But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, from side to side").

The implication of such creative self-consciousness is that Krapp's lost unity of self is a personal myth and that his recurring attempts to dramatise the decisions which caused him to lose it are the result of his need to account for the lifelong fragmentation of experience by time. Creativity, in other words, is deployed, more or less consciously, in an attempt to arrest the flux of time and so produce a self which is not just "the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing

the fluid of past time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomena of its hours" (P3D; p.15). The "true" self is hard and stable, not fluid. Krapp's imagery suggests that what is going on is a creative struggle with the predicament of existence itself: one version of the decision which Krapp feels split his existential unity takes place at the moment of his mother's death and just after he has been rejected by a nursemaid (the "dark young beauty") wheeling a perambulator. The suggestions of a release from the mother and babyhood come together in these details. The point of the symbolism is that the crucial fragmenting decision is in fact not a decision at all on the part of the individual: it is his birth. To live means to have forgone unity, to be incurably alienated. Thus the state Krapp finds himself in is inevitable because he is alive: choice never really comes into the matter. His predicament is that of everyman. That this particular man sees his lot, whether rightly or not, as being a result of his own decision, as a matter of personal responsibility, can only make us think better of him for his courage and pertinacity, and his refusal to give way to self-pity.

I have tried throughout to emphasise the resemblances and continuities between Endgame and Krapp's Last Tape. Nonetheless Krapp is, as I said at the outset, the odd man out in the Beckett œuvre - so obviously as to justify this particular emphasis in my treatment of it. We are always conscious of Krapp's instability, but that instability is never explicitly ontological. We never get a sense of his being only a parody presence or a "provisional being".

There are, however, recognisable gestures in this direction. Krapp's appearance is stylised: he has a "white face" and a "purple nose", and he wears "rusty black narrow trousers too short for him" and a "surprising pair of dirty white boots, size ten at least, very narrow

and pointed" (all p.9). His very name obviously has the same "provisional" air about it as the usual Beckett name, scatological pun and all. He has a "laborious walk" and our sense of him as a clown (funny nose, ill-fitting clothes) is reinforced by the preliminary business with the bananas and their skins. The point of this stylisation seems to be that the character we see in front of us is a tissue of the converging fictions about the past which are contained in the tapes he plays. The tapes are his attempts to create a true self. Yet here, for perhaps the only time in a Beckett play, the stylisation and the business which accompanies it does seem extrinsic, laid on from the outside, because the text does not support or promote a sense of specifically ontological instability. Krapp does not seek to penetrate that far. Perhaps it is for this reason that this is Beckett's most accessible play.

Chapter Five : EMBERS

Written 1958-9; first broadcast 24 June 1959.

Beckett himself has made the most important point about Embers (1959) : "Cendres", he remarked in an interview with P.L. Mignon, "repose sur une ambiguïté: le personnage a-t-il une hallucination ou est-il présence de la réalité?"¹ The most important point, but one to start from rather than conclude with. Beckett's question has an obvious bearing on certain details of the play: Ada moves along and sits down on the shingle noiselessly where Henry makes the expected sound; the episodes concerning Addie certainly do not occur in a realistic way ("une hallucination" or a memory of Henry's?); the hooves Henry hears are the "traditional" stylised BBC coconut-shells, butt^o of so many jokes; and Henry himself finds the "sea" worthy of mention: "That sound you hear is the sea. (Pause. Louder.) I say that sound you hear is the sea, we are sitting on the strand. (Pause.) I mention it because the sound is so strange, so unlike the sound of the sea, that if you didn't see what it was you wouldn't know what it was" (p.21). Such details exemplify the non-realistic, perhaps even anti-realistic style we should expect in a radio play by the author of All That Fall. They are not, however, any more than in the latter play, merely the quirky and eccentric manifestations of an habitual self-consciousness. As Beckett's comment ought to make clear, they suggest the large pervasive concerns of the play. The self-consciousness of a work such as Embers is anything but habitual; indeed it is the chief issue of the play, for it is Beckett's self-consciousness which creates the vital dramatic ambiguity upon which Embers is founded:

"hallucination" or "reality"?

The Addie episodes are more obviously hallucinatory than anything else in the play, yet they are rather more complex than the word "hallucination" might suggest. When Ada asks him "What do you suppose is keeping her?" Henry (but not Ada) hears a "smart blow of cylindrical ruler on piano case" from Addie's music master; Addie herself plays some scales and then a Chopin waltz, number 5 in A Flat Major. "In first chord of bass, bar 5, she plays E instead of F. Resounding blow of ruler on piano case. ADDIE stops playing" (p.29) :

Music Master : (violently).Fa!
Addie : (tearfully).What?
Music Master : (violently).Eff! Eff!
Addie : (tearfully).Where?
Music Master : (violently).Qua! (He thumps note.) Fa!

Pause. Addie begins again, Music Master beating time lightly with ruler. When she comes to bar 5 she makes same mistake. Tremendous blow of ruler on piano case. Addie stops playing, begins to wail.

Music Master : (frenziedly). Eff! Eff! (He hammers note)
Eff! (He hammers note.) Eff! Hammered note,
"Eff!" and Addie's wail amplified to
paroxysm, then suddenly cut off. Pause.

Ada : You are silent today.

Henry : It was not enough to drag her into the world, now she must learn to play the piano.

Ada : She must learn. She shall learn. That - and riding.

Hooves walking.

Riding Master: Now Miss! Elbows in Miss! Hands down Miss! (Hooves trotting.) Now Miss! Back straight Miss! Knees in Miss! (Hooves cantering.) Now Miss! Tummy in Miss! Chin up Miss! (Hooves galloping.) Now Miss! Eyes front Miss!

(Addie begins to wail.) Now Miss! Now Miss!
Galloping hooves, "Now Miss! and Addie's wail
amplified to paroxysm, then suddenly cut off.
Pause.

Ada : What are you thinking of? (Pause.) I was never taught, until it was too late. All my life I regretted it. (pp.30-1)

The two episodes are aural images of coercion, "domestic" situations which turn into nightmares. The gulf between the domestic and the nightmarish - and yet their strange forced coexistence - is caught in the wonderfully Beckettian bathos of Henry's reaction : "It was not enough to drag her into the world, now she must play the piano"; and Ada's chilling rejoinder: "She must learn. She shall learn. That - and riding." Or of Ada's comment on riding: "I was never taught, until it was too late. All my life I regretted it." The reactions seem strangely out of joint; they lack, one might say, adequate objective correlatives. Consequently there is an eerie gap between piano-playing and riding on the one hand and the violence, frenzy and paroxysm of Henry's imaginative realisation of them on the other. And of course it is precisely this creative gap that the images are about. Addie's inability to play the right note and ride according to instructions mirrors Henry's inability to find an ^{correlative} objective/for what is essentially his own creative predicament. The Addie "hallucinations" are images created by Henry of his own existential situation : like Addie he cannot "eff the ineffable" (a recurring Beckett joke here "amplified to paroxysm"); he can only recruit memories or scenes which are available to him and press them into service by modifying and shaping them into images of the self in creation. (The idea of the coerced artist becomes especially prominent - though it is implicitly present throughout Beckett's

work - in the radio plays of the early 'sixties: Words and Music, Cascando, Radio II.) But the images of inadequacy are themselves inadequate - they too miss ("Now Miss! Now Miss!") their ontological target - and this creative - ontological failure is powerfully suggested (in our, purely literary, terms) in Henry's oddly fractured reaction, "It was not enough to drag her into the world, now she must play the piano." The significance of the line (and of those containing Ada's reactions to the riding) consists not in what piano-playing (or riding) means but in what Henry has made it mean.

The Addie episodes, then, can hardly be called "realistic", but are they totally hallucinatory? Or, to put it another way, are they merely happenings within Henry's mind exclusive of anything external? It is important to note that what we hear is Addie's voice (and her music /riding master's), and not just Henry's "version" of it. The distinction is important enough for Beckett to have made it some moments earlier :

Henry : ...horrid little creature, wish to God we'd never had her, I use to walk with her in the fields, Jesus that was awful, she wouldn't let go my hand and I mad to talk. 'Run along now, Addie, and look at the lambs.' (Imitating Addie's voice.) 'No papa.' 'Go on now, go on'. (Plaintive.) 'No papa!' (Violent.) 'Go on with you when you're told and look at the lambs!' (Addie's loud wail...) (p.26)

The moment Addie's "loud wail" breaks out is one of the most haunting in a play full of haunting moments. The difference between imitation and real imagining is a crucial one for Henry, since he needs to believe that others - not just his own invented characters - are with him. We have seen that the Addie episodes are essentially Henry's own

unsuccessful images of himself (though they might be based on memories), but he needs to believe that they do concern someone other than himself. Part of the impact of his curious reaction to the piano-playing paroxysm ("It was not enough...") is, I think, the weird compassion it shows for someone else. It cannot be reduced to self-pity. Indeed, it is partly because Addie is still, to Henry, another person, that the image is unsuccessful on its own, ontological, terms. Though he dare not, for purposes of survival, admit his own failing creativity, Henry can imagine and even sympathise with that of others: it is the lack of impersonality in his imaginings which betrays him and his own failing creativity.

Several details in Embers suggest the protagonist's creative decline. Henry repeats a strange line in his story: "Vega in the Lyre very green" (p.23). Vega is the brightest star in the constellation Lyra, here fading; the name comes from the Arabic al-Waqi, the falling; and of course the Lyre itself is a traditional emblem for artistic creation. Ada contrasts the sea as it was when she and Henry made love by it with what it is now : "It was rough, the spray came flying over us. (Pause.) Strange it should have been rough then. (Pause.) And calm now" (p.29). They remember the hollow where they "did it at last for the first time" :

Ada : The place has not changed.

Henry : Oh yes it has, I can see it. (Confidentially)
There is a levelling going on! (p.34)

The hooves which Henry invokes function as, among other things, an index of his power to invoke, his imagination. He can call them up before the conversation with Ada, but not after. And during the conversation :

Henry : Hooves! (Pause. Louder.) Hooves! (Sound of hooves walking on hard road. They die rapidly away.) Again! Hooves as before. Pause.

Ada : Did you hear them?

Henry : Not well.

Ada : Galloping?

Henry : No. (pp.27-8)

But the most complex and important image and index of Henry's creativity is of course the one involving the "embers" of the play's title, the story of Bolton and Holloway.

"This I fancy", says the thirty-nine year old Krapp, "is what I have chiefly to record this evening, against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, warm or cold, for the miracle that...(hesitates) for the fire that set it alight" (pp.15-16).

The miracle-fire is a creative fire, the writer's energy, and the next-to-last sentence we hear in the play, as we look at the Krapp who "crawled out once or twice, before the summer was cold", to sit "shivering in the park", is: "Not with the fire in me now." Embers (whose sister-play Krapp is) takes up the image and dampens it. The association of fire and warmth with artistic creation is commonplace. For an example - which is itself an allusion - we need go no further than Joyce's Stephen Dedalus: "When the esthetic image is first conceived in the artist's imagination...the mind in that mysterious instant Shelley likened beautifully to a fading coal." ² Or Kafka - as might be expected the creator of the Bucketrider is closer in spirit to Beckett even than Joyce :

6 December. From a letter : 'During this dreary winter I warm myself by it. Metaphors are one among many things which make me despair of writing. Writing's lack of independence of the world, its

dependence on the maid who tends the fire,
on the cat warming itself by the stove; it
is even dependent on the poor old human being
warming himself by the stove. All these are
independent activities ruled by their own
laws: only writing is helpless, cannot live
in itself, is a joke and a despair.³

In enacting the "law" of writing which it describes (that writing is always dependent on something other than itself) by building up a symbolic image of domestic inter-dependence, this passage anticipates Embers, and indeed much else in Beckett, in a quite remarkable way. It not only brings forth an image which might fairly be taken by anyone as typical of Beckett: more important, it gives us a succinct and accurate description of the basic structure of all Beckett's plays, a structure which the central figure (Hamm, Krapp, Henry, Winnie, Mouth, May) is seen continually to produce symbolic images of his or her own creative-ontological predicament.

Henry's "unfinished" narrative about Bolton and Holloway ("I never finished it, I never finished any of them, I never finished anything, everything always went on forever", pp.22-3); contains the chief symbolic image of Embers. He makes three attempts at the story during the play (two before and one after the conversation with Ada), the last ending in an impasse which we can only presume is familiar to him. He starts off (but where is his real "beginning"?) with an invocation (for this is what it is: "Bolton...Bolton!" p.23) of "an old fellow called Bolton" (p.22) "standing there on the hearthrug in the dark before the fire with his arms on the chimney-piece and his head on his arms, standing there waiting in the dark before the fire in his old red dressing-gown and no sound in the house of any kind, only the sound of the fire", and "no light, only the light of the fire,...an old man in great trouble" (like Kafka's "poor old human

being"). "Ring then at the door and over he goes to the window and looks out between the hangings, fine old chap, very big and strong, bright winter's night, snow everywhere, bitter cold, white world, cedar boughs bending under load, and then as the arm goes up to ring again recognises Holloway...(long pause)...yes, Holloway, recognises Holloway, goes down and opens" (p.23).

Holloway is brisk, terse, businesslike, vulgar even: he stands "on the hearthrug trying to toast his arse,...fine old chap, six foot, burly, legs apart, hands behind his back holding up the tails of his old macfarlane" (p.24). But Bolton continues to gaze out through the hangings at the "white world" outside. Henry's cadence is slow but vertiginous: "...great trouble, not a sound, only the embers, sound of dying, dying glow, Holloway, Bolton, Bolton, Holloway, old men, great trouble, white world, not a sound" (p.24). He breaks off the story momentarily, but resolves to "try again". Holloway starts to complain about being called out by his "old friend, in the cold and dark,...urgent need, bring a bag, then not a word, no explanation, no heat, no light". Bolton does not explain: the only word he can summon is "'Please! PLEASE!'" Ignoring him, Holloway complains even more, but his judgement of Bolton's hospitality ("no refreshment, no welcome") merges inexorably with Henry's judgement of his own narrative ability: "...white beam from the window, ghostly scene, wishes to God to hadn't come, no good, fire out, bitter cold, great trouble, white world, not a sound, no good. (Pause.) No good. (Pause.) Can't do it" (p.25). Thus the second attempt at the story peters out.

The third and last attempt comes near the end of the play, when Ada has left Henry and the fragments of narrative "rubbish" she provided

for him have been exhausted. It seems he has reached a crisis of imaginative power, for he can no longer call up even the "sound of hooves walking on a hard road" (pp.121-2), which assured him of his mental strength at the beginning of the play. The continuation of the story is strange, haunting and, as Henry himself admits, "difficult to describe". Nevertheless it is crucial to the understanding of the play and it demands to be quoted in toto :

Christ! (Pause.) 'My dear Bolton...' (Pause.)
 'If it's an injection you want, Bolton, let down your trousers and I'll give you one, I have a panhysterectomy at nine,' meaning of course the anaesthetic. (Pause.) Fire out, bitter cold, white world, great trouble, not a sound. (Pause.) Bolton starts playing with the curtain, no, kind of gathers it towards him and the moon comes flooding in, then lets it fall back, heavy velvet affair, and pitch black in the room, then towards him again, white, black, white, black, Holloway : 'Stop that for the love of God, Bolton, do you want to finish me?' (Pause.) Black, white, black, white, maddening thing. (Pause.) Then he suddenly strikes a match, Bolton does, lights candle, catches it up above his head, walks over and looks Holloway full in the eye. (Pause.) Not a word, just the look, the old blue eye, very glassy, lids worn thin, lashes gone, whole thing swimming, and the candle shaking over his head. (Pause.) Tears? (Pause. Long laugh.) Good God no! (Pause.) Not a word, just the look, the old blue eye, Holloway: 'If you want a shot say so and let me get to hell out of here.' (Pause.) 'We've had this before, Bolton, don't ask me to go through it again.' (Pause.) Bolton: 'Please!' (Pause.) 'Please!' (Pause.) 'Please, Holloway!' (Pause.) Candle shaking and guttering all over the place, lower now, old arm tired, takes it in the other hand and holds it high again, that's it, that was always it, night, and the embers cold, and the glim shaking in your old fist, saying, Please! Please! (Pause.) Begging. (Pause.) Of the poor. (Pause.) Ada! (Pause.) Father! (Pause.) Christ! (Pause.) Holds it high again, naughty world, fixes Holloway, eyes drowned, won't ask again, first the look, Holloway covers his face, not a sound, white world, bitter cold, ghostly scene, old men, great trouble, no good. (Pause.) No good. (Pause.) Christ!

(pp.38-9)

Hersh Zeifman, for whom Embers "dramatizes a quest for salvation, a quest which, as always, ultimately proves fruitless"⁴, sees this scene as "a paradigm of human suffering and divine rejection".⁵

Bolton's desperate plea to Holloway for help mirrors the confrontation between Henry and his father. Bolton is thus a surrogate for Henry - implicitly identified with Christ as sufferer. Both his name (Bolton) and the fact that he wears a red dressing gown (the color is repeated three times in the text) link him with the Crucifixion (before Christ was nailed to the cross, he was dressed in a scarlet robe). And Holloway, the recipient of Bolton's supplication, is a surrogate for Henry's father - implicitly identified with Christ as savior. Like Christ, Holloway is a physician, a potential healer of men's souls. But the identification is an ironic one. The Physician of the Gospels exclaimed, "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6); the physician of Embers is a hollow-way, a way of leading no where. And whereas Christ's death on the cross at "the ninth hour" represents birth into a new life and a promise of salvation, Holloway's actions, likewise at the ninth hour, result in the death of new life, a universal denial of salvation: "If it's an injection you want, Bolton, let down your trousers and I'll give you one, I have a panhysterectomy at nine" (italics added).⁶

The point is well made: Henry's story introduces a religious dimension into Embers, and this religious dimension is in technical terms an emblematic structure. Zeifman's exegesis (like Knowlson's of Krapp) concentrates on emblems: the red dressing gown, the encoding names of the characters, the Physician-figure and the mention of the "ninth hour". As in Krapp, this approach sorts well with the creating character's self-consciousness in composition: Henry is no doubt meant to be seen to be using emblems. Thus the religious-emblematic reading is illuminating as far as it goes; but it does not go far enough. Above all it fails to suggest how the rest of the play actively supports this kind of interpretation;

more particularly - and more obviously - it leaves out rather too much in the way of detail of what it purports to explicate. For example: Why does Bolton play with the hanging in the way he does? (Or rather, why does Henry take such trouble to describe what he thinks of as being merely "playing"?) What significance has the candle? Bolton's eyes? Why does Holloway react as he does? To draw out the full significance of the scene we need to answer these questions.

Hugh Kenner moralises about Henry as he does about Krapp. Henry is "the 'washout', the sterile hating man who vexes the voices of the absent: Henry unfrozen by compassion for his own fiction, which (in a circle fatally closed) is about an impasse produced by a need for compassion". His story is "a fictive projection of his urgent need for communion"; and again: "Bolton [is] begging for what Holloway cannot give, what no one can give him since he cannot receive it, communion."⁷ Yet this is sentimental, or at the very least superficial. Nothing in this play is more obvious than that the "urgent need" of the solipsist Henry is not for "compassion" or "communion" (at least not in Kenner's sense of that word) but for words, the stuff of invention: "keep on, keep on!...keep it going," he implores Ada at one point, "every syllable is a second gained", and seconds later he declares of his story: "I can't!...I can't do it any more!" (p.36) We should expect, therefore, that when he does manage to "do it" once more, his story should be about "doing it".

The final Bolton - Holloway scene is puzzling, but there is no grand "key" to its meaning. It works by way of suggestion and the relationship of its images to the larger symbols created by Henry

in the rest of the play; that is, it can only be fully understood as part of the symbolic structure Henry has created and is still creating for himself. However, one must start with local suggestion. Bolton's embers are dead ("Fire out, bitter cold"), and, whereas before there had been "no light, only the light of the fire" (p.23), he now has to create his own light for the interview with Holloway. Thus he starts "playing with the curtain, no hanging, difficult to describe, draws it back, no, kind of gathers it towards him..." The "difficulty" here, for both Henry and Beckett, concerns suggestion: the specific "curtain" is altered to "hanging" which, though it too refers to a particular thing, is capable of a wider application; the alteration from "draws it back" to "kind of gathers it towards him" (which also involves a movement towards vagueness) has a similar effect. The alternate "white, black, white, black" when Bolton plays with the hanging enacts the effect of an eye blinking, and I think it is to gain this suggestion that Henry's alterations are made: the "hanging" is a kind of eye-lid - a very tired one, and thus is "kind of gathered" rather than "drawn". The implication of this detail is that, as with the stage-set of Endgame, Henry's story presents an image of a skull-room in the midst of a waste land. The waste land of this story is a landscape of snow, a "white world" - perhaps this is a Christmas story ("Christ!" is one of Henry's most frequent and significant exclamations) like Hamm's "chronicle". The inner fire having died, Bolton is "playing with" the eye-lid/hanging in order to let in the light of the outer world. The candle he then lights is the last resort, the last creative deed in a literally "naughty world". Holloway is willing to give Bolton an anaesthetic or to remove his creativity altogether, thus setting the seal on his predicament. In fact the ambiguity of Henry's narration at this point suggests that the anaesthetic and the "panhysterectomy" are the

same thing : "'If it's an injection you want, Bolton, let down your trousers and I'll give you one, I have a panhysterectomy at nine', meaning of course the anaesthetic." "Anaesthetic" refers back to "injection", but Henry's delay in telling us so has the effect of eliding this idea with that of the "panhysterectomy", as though that concerned Bolton as well. Indeed in an important sense it does, for anaesthetic is a pun, where an - is negative: an-aesthetic.⁸

Both the panhysterectomy Holloway mentions and the "an-aesthetic" he offers Bolton are ways of negating and destroying creativity.

It seems that Bolton's plea is not for the an-aesthetic (or the anaesthetic). We might assume that he is pleading for exactly the opposite : a creative fire, a warmth and light that Holloway cannot give. And yet we are never told that: Henry's narrative does not give us the information which is so vital to an understanding of it. It is as though Henry had again failed to find an adequate objective correlative for those inner needs which he is apparently obliged to express. Hence one feels that something crucially important is being hidden behind the puzzlingly intense words of Holloway to Bolton when the latter looks him "full in the eye" : "'Stop that for the love of God, Bolton, do you want to finish me?'...'We've had this before, Bolton, don't ask me to go through it again'." Finally "Holloway covers his face". But why should Holloway feel that a look from the "eyes drowned" would "finish" him?

It is important for the critic to recognise that the existence of these questions hints at their solutions. They exist because Henry's creativity is breaking down and he can no longer maintain his narrative impersonality. The story is coming apart, but at the same time it is managing to produce an image which counterpoints its own failure. Henry is losing his creative impersonality and

consequently moving inexorably into identity with his fictional creation, Bolton. And this process is exactly what is being represented by the story: what Holloway fears - the thing which will quite literally "finish" his identity as Holloway - is a merging of identity with Bolton. The narrative image counterpoints Henry's own creative predicament rather than merely mirrors it because it contains an extra element, that of Bolton's pleading. Nevertheless Henry makes his identity with Bolton more or less explicit: "Candle shaking and guttering all over the place, lower now, old arm tired, takes it in the other hand and holds it high again, that's it, that was always it, night, and the embers cold, and the glim shaking in your old fist, saying, Please! Please! (Pause.) Begging. (Pause.) Of the poor. (Pause.) Ada! (Pause.) Father! (Pause.) Christ!" Henry's own fiction has revealed his begging (the "Please!" is now Henry's) for what it is and always was. Ada's "prophecy" (which Henry seems to ignore) is fulfilled :

The time comes when one cannot speak to you any more. (Pause.) The time will come when no one will speak to you at all, not even complete strangers. (Pause.) You will be quite alone with your voice, there will be no other voice in the world but yours. (p.35)

Ada's and Addie's voices have disappeared long since; now Henry cannot even manage impersonations of his fictional characters. All his fictions, from whatever direction, end up merging with him. Ada and Addie seem real enough - particularly the former - as other presences, but they are revealed as essentially projections of his own mind, based on "reality" though they might be. And his story ("a great one") from which he seems at first so detached, reveals itself in the end to have been all about him. Perhaps it was not so detached from him after all: Ada, advising him about his talking, tells him to "see Holloway" (p.34). One of his inventions commends him to another. "A-t-il une

hallucination ou est-il présence de la réalité?"

Bolt(on) and Hollow(way) are complementary, made for each other. The imagery which portends and attends their coming together and Henry's consequent creative collapse relates importantly to and indeed takes its place within the symbolism of the play. From the skull-room with its window-eyes (and hanging-lids) the narrative focus abruptly narrows down, when Bolton "lights a candle, catches it up above his head, walks over and looks Holloway full in the eye", to Bolton's own skull and its "old blue eye, very glassy, lids worn thin, lashes gone, whole thing swimming..." The eye becomes a kind of sea, for, despite Henry's dismissal of tears with a "long laugh", the "whole thing" is "swimming" until "eyes drowned" and "Holloway covers his face". It is as though Holloway himself is drowning in Bolton's eye. Earlier it is when, because of Bolton's playing with the hanging, "the moon [controller of the seas] comes flooding in", that Holloway declares, "Stop that for the love of God, Bolton, do you want to finish me?" In the light of what we have already noted about the merging of the identities of Bolton and Holloway, the pun on "eye" is clear (this is after all an aural and not a visual play): Holloway is indeed drowning in Bolton's "I" - hence the ambiguous "eyes drowned" which could apply to either character but which of course applies to them both: "'I's drowned." One might almost say that the symbolic structure of Embers (which is also Henry's own imaginative structure) is built on the punning relation of eye-I to see-sea.

Holloway's terror of drowning in Bolton's eye is Henry's created image of his own terror of drowning in or being drowned by (the distinction is important) the sea. The sound of the sea is the reason why Henry has to keep talking :

Today it's calm, but I often hear it above in
the house and walking the roads and start talking,
oh just loud enough to drown it, nobody notices.

(p.22)

The real sea (but what is the real sea in the play?) colludes with
the one in his head: "...I'd be talking now no matter where I was,
I once went to Switzerland to get away from the cursed thing and
never stopped all the time I was there" (p.22). Indeed what Henry
hears - and the listener with him - seems at once like the sea but
not the sea.⁹ "Listen to it," he cries at a moment when words seem to
have failed him, "Close your eyes and listen to it, what would you
think it was?" And, as the creator of Dan Rooney is always aware, our
eyes too are, in effect, closed; when, at the beginning of the play,
Henry addresses the "old man, blind and foolish" whom he takes to
be his father "back from the dead, to be with me...in this strange
place," he is also addressing the radio-listener:¹⁰

I say that sound you hear is the sea, we are
sitting on the strand. (Pause.) I mention it
because the sound is so strange, so unlike the
sound of the sea, that if you didn't see what
it was you wouldn't know what it was.

Again, it is important to grasp that this is not just a joke on the
"blind" audience or a reminder of the nature of the medium (though
it is certainly that too), nor is it just a preliminary scene-setting.
"Sea" states Beckett's direction baldly, but what we hear in the
original BBC performance of Embers (produced by Donald McWhinnie) is
indeed very "unlike the sound of the sea". "Close your eyes and
listen to it", orders Henry, "what would you think it was?...Listen
to it! What is it like?" (p.29) "Like my Hoover," wrote a BBC
Third Programme panel member.¹¹ As we shall see, she (or he) was not
far from the truth. What then does the sea-sound mean? Or what does

it suggest? Obviously the real sea "means" nothing, but the sea in Henry's head has a palpable significance for him, elusive though it may be.

The salient facts can be pieced together from Henry's monologue.

His self-questioning hints at them :

And I live on the brink of it! Why? Professional obligations? (Brief laugh.) Reasons of health? (Brief laugh.) Family ties? (Brief laugh.) A woman? (Laugh in which she [Ada] joins.) Some old grave I cannot tear myself away from? (Pause.)

(pp.28-9)

The absence of a laugh confirms the last question, though it is always difficult for Henry to admit this possibility. He favours indirection, describing his father's drowning in the sea as "that evening bathe you took once too often" (p.22). This evasiveness is important, for it draws attention to another of the play's significant ambiguities: was Henry's father washed out to sea whilst taking his evening bathe, or did he commit suicide? Or again did he allow himself to be washed out whilst bathing? This death bears a deeply ambiguous relation to suicide, and suicide casts its shadow over the whole play, for it is one of Henry's alternatives - in the end, perhaps, the only one which remains.

At this point I think some important parallels between Embers and Tennyson's Maud are worth dwelling upon. The propriety of the comparison is first of all formal, since the hero of Maud, as Christopher Ricks notes, "is so near madness - and does indeed go mad ["There's something wrong with your brain," Ada tells Henry", p.33.] - that it is possible, apt, and compelling for "successive phases of passion in one person [to] take the place of successive persons".

The question here is what does Henry think it is? Why do we assume that the drip is water? (Compare Hamm in Endgame : "Something dripping in my head, ever since the fontanelles...Splash, splash, always on the same spot...Perhaps it's a little vein...A little artery." E, p.35.)

The Embers - sea also has lips - and not only lips :

Listen to it! (Pause.) Lips and claws! (Pause.)
Get away from it! Where it couldn't get at me!
The Pampas! What? (p.28)

Henry's later description of the sea sound as "this...sucking" (p.33. "Like my hoover"?) compounds the suggestiveness. His intensely physical revulsion from a place or thing, as if it were some sexually devouring female (vagina dentata?) sorts well with the opening of Tennyson's poem : "I hate the dreadful hollow..." The sea does not wait passively to receive him; it seems physically to pursue him ("Get away from it! Where it couldn't get at me!") and to insinuate itself into his mind.

Despite his obsession with his father's death, the relationship between the two of them appears to have been an ambiguous one :

Father! (Pause.) You wouldn't know me now, you'd be sorry you ever had me, but you were that already, a washout, that's the last I heard from you, a washout. (Pause. Imitating father's voice.) 'Are you coming for a dip?' 'Come on, come on.' 'No.' Glare, stump to door, turn, glare. 'A washout, that's all you are, a washout!' (Violent slam of door. Pause.) Again! (Slam. Pause.) Slam life shut like that! (Pause.) Washout.¹⁶ Wish to Christ she had.

(p.25)

His father is not blamed for his harshness, in fact by imagining the reproof Henry acquiesces in it: though "an old man, blind and foolish", the father still holds sway (like the Freudian super-ego) in the son's mind. Henry's need for his father makes him at times even servile.

On the other hand, however, there are distinct traces of a grudge born against his mother: he "wishes to Christ she had" "slammed life shut on him. And there is an important pun in one passage (noticed by the TLS reviewer on the play's first appearance in print¹⁷):

Father! (Pause.) Tired of talking to you. (Pause.) That was always the way, walk all over the mountains with you talking and talking and then suddenly mum and home in misery and not a word to a soul for weeks, sulky old bastard, better off dead, better off dead.

(p.26)

"Mum" is the stopping of talking. Is she also the stopper of talking? Henry's only other reference to his mother is similarly ambiguous :

We never found your body, you know, that held up probate an unconscionable time, they said there was nothing to prove you hadn't run away from us all and alive and well under a false name in the Argentine for example, that grieved mother greatly.

(p.22)

What "grieved mother greatly"? That the body was never found? If so, was her grief because "that held up probate an unconscionable time"? Henry tells us that he got the money, and presumably his mother knew he would : her "grief" would therefore bespeak her concern for him. But does he hold against her an unfeeling attitude towards her husband?

We must limit our speculation here, but we may now ask a propos Embers, in Buck Mulligan's words : "Isn't the sea what Algy calls it: a grey sweet mother?"¹⁸ Or rather, for Henry, a great devouring mother? No doubt we have here another version of that obsessive Beckett image, the imperfect birth, with Henry striving

to free himself completely from the devouring womb of the mother - sea, which will not let him go. John Fletcher provides an Oedipal interpretation :

Here, as in Camus' L'Étranger, the sea represents the mother whose person is denied firmly to the son. After the death of the father (whose body was never found, a symbol of the repression by the son of the paternal image), the son finds the courage to defy his interdicts by crossing the bay and thereby indulging his own incest-fantasy. But the son's temerity is a relative thing, for he still depends on the father: before he disappeared, the father "glared" at his offspring, calling him a "washout", and thus he denied all valid connection between his wife and their son.¹⁹

We are back with the anagogical kind of interpretation, and one which, what is more, entirely fails to do justice to the structure and meaning of the play, ending up as an inadequate psychoanalysis of Henry. Nevertheless, an allusion to Freud is I think in order at this stage. Henry's sea is clearly similar to Freud's "oceanic" feeling :

...originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive - indeed all-embracing - feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it. If we may assume that there are many people in whose mental life this primary ego-feeling has persisted to a greater or less degree, it would exist in them side by side with the narrower and more sharply demarcated ego-feeling of maturity, like a kind of counterpart to it. In that case, the ideational contents appropriate to it would be precisely those of limitlessness and of a bond with the universe - the same ideas with which my friend elucidated the 'oceanic' feeling.²⁰

This is obviously very relevant to Embers, but to interpret the play strictly in these terms and in the light of what they imply, as David Alpaugh has done, is to adopt a moralism which is alien not

only to this work but to all Beckett's drama. For Alpaugh Embers "consists of a series of attempts by infantile adults (Henry, his father, Bolton) and in one case an actual child (Addie) to secure paternal company...The father offers the possibility not of retreating from but of reaching and living in the external world, of severing oneself from the womb, of conquering the environment, of being really born".²¹ Henry's "consciousness" is infantile, "his sense of a private self" "hypertrophied and over-defined, the boundaries of his ego having been too tightly drawn through a revulsion to the omnipresent sea of anti-self".²² With reference to Lionel Trilling's Freud-influenced reading of the Immortality Ode ("O joy! that in our embers/Is something that doth live"), Alpaugh argues that

Henry's goal is diametrically opposed to Wordsworth's: to move away from rather than towards the sea; to repress rather than cultivate oceanic awareness. Or, to approach this quest by a complementary handle, in Wordsworth the adult successfully seeks and finds the child within him, but in Beckett Henry, infantile to begin, is engaged in a futile quest of the child within man to find fatherhood. (Alpaugh's emphases)²³

The inappropriateness of the moral assumption upon which this argument is based - that it is perfectly possible for the infantile Henry to achieve the radiant sunlit uplands of maturity - cannot be concealed by the veneer of "Beckettian" phrases like "being really born" and "futile quest". Any such judgement (about the inability of Henry to achieve maturity) will be a judgement not of Henry, or rather not only of Henry, but of Beckett himself - and that is another matter.

However, this is no reason to abandon the "oceanic" feeling as

irrelevant to our purposes. Anton Ehrenzweig's inclusion of the idea into a theory of artistic creation is more promising :

Freud spoke of an 'oceanic' feeling characteristic of religious experience; the mystic feels at one with the universe, his individual existence lost like a drop in the ocean. He may re-experience a primitive state of mind when the child was not yet aware of his separate individuality, but felt at one with his mother. Fantasies of returning to the womb may have this mystic oceanic quality. It is now widely realised that any - not only religious - creative experience can produce an oceanic state. In my view this state need not be due to a 'regression', to an infantile state, but could be the product of the extreme dedifferentiation in lower levels of the ego which occurs during creative work. Dedifferentiation suspends many kinds of boundaries and distinctions; at an extreme limit it may remove the boundaries of individual existence and so produce a mystic oceanic feeling that is distinctly manic in quality.²⁴

Some fine exegesis by Hersh Zeifman suggests that these sort of concepts are not altogether foreign to Embers. The last lines of the play are very puzzling :

Little book. (Pause.) This evening....(Pause.)
Nothing this evening. (Pause.) Tomorrow...
tomorrow...plumber at nine, then nothing. (Pause.
Puzzled.) Plumber at nine? (Pause.) Ah yes, the
waste. (Pause.) Words. (Pause.) Saturday...nothing.
Sunday...Sunday...nothing all day. (Pause.)
Nothing, all day nothing. (Pause.) All day all
night nothing. (Pause.) Not a sound.
Sea.

(p.39)

Zeifman notes that in a poem called "Calvary By Night",²⁵ included in the short story "A Wet Night", Beckett speaks of the death of Christ ("Christ!" cries Henry repeatedly) as being a "re-enwombing" in "the water/the waste of water", a plumbing of the depths, in other words: "Keeping in mind the image of Christ's death as a descent into

water, the "plumber" [at the end of Embers] is thus seen to refer to Jesus, who was crucified on Friday at the ninth hour. Christ therefore "plumbs" the waste ("the waste/the waste of water"). But "waste" also refers to the significance of his death. For on Saturday, the day of waiting, there is nothing; but there is likewise nothing on Sunday, the day of resurrection, the day on which Christ should rise from the dead and regain paradise for man".²⁶ (The "waste" is also the words Henry has used.) After this "re-enwombing" there is no rebirth.

Ehrenzweig too connects the "oceanic" feeling with a re-enwombment ("fantasies of returning to the womb...") and he goes on to suggest that the "creative experience can produce an oceanic state." He discards the notion (which Alpaugh takes up) that such experience is "infantile" and goes on to claim that the "oceanic" state "could be the product of the extreme dedifferentiation in lower levels of the ego which occurs during creative work." The idea of "dedifferentiation", which "suspends many kinds of boundaries and distinctions" and "at an extreme limit may remove the boundaries of individual existence and so produce" the "oceanic" feeling, might seem at first alien to Embers. But consider Henry's strange yet urgent need for hard, regular sounds, seemingly to offset the undifferentiated "sucking" roar of the "lips and claws": the "violent slam of the door" he imagines twice as his father calls him (its antithesis) a "washout"; Addie's music master "beating time lightly with ruler as she plays (p.29, and his "tremendous blow of ruler on piano case"); Ada's strong point at school, "geometry, I suppose, plane and solid...First plane, then solid (p.31); their lovemaking ("years we kept hammering away at it, p.34); Henry's wanting to go for a row (p.34); his childish response to Ada's question, "Did you put on your jaegers,

Henry?": "What happened was this, I put them on and then I took them off again and then I put them on again and then I took them off again and then I put them on again and then I - " (p.27); the remorseless drip which he invokes; Bolton's playing with the hanging ("Black, white, black, white"); the scrunching sound of the shingle as Henry walks ("On!" p.21). And, most obvious of all, the sound of hooves which Henry invokes repeatedly, "hooves walking on hard road". We hear them in Addie's nightmare riding-lesson ("amplified to paroxysm") which Henry imagines. They are the index of his imaginative power - at the end of the play he cannot hear them. And they must be rhythmically regular; his strangest fancies are about hooves marking time :

Train it to mark time! Shoe it with steel and
tie it up in the yard, have it stamp all day!
(Pause.) A ten-ton mammoth back from the dead,
shoe it with steel and have it tramp the world
down! (Pause.) Listen to it!

(p.22)

And later, having called up the hooves again :

Henry : ...Could a horse mark time?

Pause.

Ada : I'm not sure that I know what you mean.

Henry : (irritably). Could a horse be trained to stand still and mark time with its four legs?

Ada : Oh. (Pause.) The ones I used to fancy all did. (She laughs. Pause.) Laugh, Henry, it's not every day I crack a joke.

(p.28)

Ada reduces Henry's obsession, frantic as it is, to a joke; and indeed it is she who tries to seduce him into abandoning himself to the sea in a powerful passage which makes explicit the antithesis of the differentiated "sucking" ocean and the rhythmic solidity

of individual identity :

Ada : It's silly to say it keeps you from hearing it, it doesn't keep you from hearing it and even if it does you shouldn't be hearing it, there must be something wrong with your brain.

Pause.

Henry : That! I shouldn't be hearing that!

Ada : I don't think you are hearing it. And if you are what's wrong with it, it's a lovely peaceful gentle soothing sound, why do you hate it? (Pause.) And if you hate it why don't you keep away from it? Why are you always coming down here? (Pause.) There's something wrong with your brain, you ought to see Holloway, he's alive still, isn't he?

Pause.

Henry : (wildly). Thuds, I want thuds! Like this! (He fumbles in the shingle, catches up two big stones and starts dashing them together.) Stone! (Clash.) Stone! (Clash.) 'Stone!' and clash amplified, cut off. Pause. He throws the other stone away. Sound of its fall.) Not this...(pause)...sucking!

Ada : And why life? (Pause.) Why life, Henry?

(pp.32-3)

In this haunting passage we are listening on one level to Henry's internal conflict, for Ada is primarily a projection (foisted onto his apparently dead wife) of his own desire for oceanic oblivion, set against the wild clutching at his own imperilled individual identity: "Thuds, I want thuds!" To Ada's last, quiet, terrible question there is no real answer, for his life is that clutching. Ada's voice is "low" and "remote" (p.26) throughout, like the sound of the sea. In a sense she is the voice of the sea; her invitations to Henry are almost sexual - and yet something else too :

Ada : Underneath all is as quiet as the grave.
Not a sound. All day, all night, not a sound.

Pause.

Henry : Now I walk about with the gramophone. But I forgot it today.

Ada : There is no sense in that. (Pause.) There is no sense in trying to drown it.

(p.34)

She even makes "jokes" :

Ada : Who were you with just now? (Pause.) Before you spoke to me.

Henry : I was trying to be with my father.

Ada : Oh. (Pause.) No difficulty about that.

(p.35)

It is against such insinuations, which are - this is the important paradox - alienated products of his own mind, that Henry sets the thudding stones of the real, solid identity he aspires to. His aspiration is heroic, for everything and everyone, even his "wife", seems to lure him into the "lips and claws" : the unadmitted areas of his own mind are slowly but inexorably invading his conscious "self".

There is a struggle within Henry, then, between the desire for a "hard" differentiation of identity and the pull (or the sucking) of "oceanic" dedifferentiation. We must recall at this point that Ehrenzweig's theory (since his are the terms we are using) is one of artistic creation, whereby a newly differentiated form is reborn out of an "oceanic" dedifferentiation. This is where we must depart from Ehrenzweig, for rebirth is not a possibility in the Embers-world ("We never found your body"): Beckett's attitude to creativity is

rather more complex.

There is one creative activity - and it is present within Embers - which combines the regular rhythms Henry desires and the "oceanic" dissolution he fears. "At the height of being in love," wrote Freud, "the boundary between ego and object threatens to melt away."²⁷ Beckett presents, if not the "height of...love", at least the height of sex, enacting physical rhythm with language :

Ada : Don't wet your good boots.

Pause.

Henry : Don't, don't...

Sea suddenly rough.

Ada : (twenty years earlier, imploring). Don't!
Don't!

Henry : (do. urgent). Darling!

Ada : (do. more feebly). Don't!

Henry : (do. exultantly). Darling!

Rough sea. Ada cries out. Cry and sea
amplified, cut off. End of evocation.

(pp.31-2)

Alpaugh (having quoted the Freud sentence) writes :

Once Henry's private enclosure dissolved as, overwhelmed by passion, he swam with Ada in a sea of undifferentiated matter. The incident is recalled with pain, not rapture, and the sense of victimization on both sides is keen. By associating an amplified and aggressive sea with the sexual act, Beckett reminds us that sex, like death, is a process which exterminates personality.²⁸

Also, we might add, like artistic creation - and here we are approaching the central dynamic of Embers. Henry uses, is obliged to use, his invention as a dyke against the encroaching sea-sound, and yet this invention is a long failure : "Vega in the Lyre very

green" and the embers of the imagination slowly dying. "The time will come when no one will speak to you at all", Ada tells him, "you will be quite alone with your voice". And then, in the inevitable last stage, even this voice will fail. Yet the only way for Henry to achieve "perfect" invention, the true being he needs, is to give himself over to precisely that sea-sound he is endeavouring to drown by inventing, for the only "successful" creation, that of absolute being, is oblivion, and in Embers this means drowning, mentally and physically, in the sea and its sound. "Perhaps the most perfect expression of Being", Beckett once said, "would be an ejaculation".²⁹

The pun crystallises the intimate relation between sexual and artistic creativity which is implicit in Embers but which is to emerge more explicitly in Happy Days and Play. It also suggests the ontological significance of the "perfect" creation: the ejaculation which appears at the moment when being, striving for its fullest possible expression, achieves its aim - and here is the paradox - in annihilation. The fundamental contradiction upon which Embers is built is that its central figure (its only figure) wants true being but he also wants survival, or what he calls life: "That's life! Not this...sucking!" His situation, the situation of the Beckettian artist, is one of survival against oblivion, existence against being.

This then is the essential dynamic of Embers. It is enigmatic and elusive because it presents itself in concrete terms. To explicate the play as though it were organised according to an abstract system of ideas would be to supply precisely the kind of anagogical exegesis we faulted earlier on in our discussion. John Pilling remarks that Embers "is the first of Beckett's dramatic works that seems to lack a

real centre".³⁰ As a criticism I do not feel that this holds (especially since Pilling fails to argue the point at all strongly), but as a

response to the structure and organisation of the play it is perhaps suggestive. If at the play's "centre" the critic expects an explicitly and coherently formulated set of ideas (and Pilling's book repeatedly shows itself keen on the way concepts recur in Beckett's writing) he will come away disappointed. Embers was conceived and is organised in terms of concrete images rather than abstract concepts, and consequently its structure is symbolic rather than emblematic : it functions by means of the accumulation and shaping of significant detail and suggestion rather than by way of the mechanical calculation of meaning on separate levels.

However, there is, as we have seen, one strand of the play which does not tie in with these generalisations - the more self-conscious and essentially emblematic religious theme pointed out by Hersch Zeifman. The exception serves as a reminder that the symbolic structure of Embers is to be seen as Henry's as well as Beckett's : its self-consciousness suggests that it might be something invented by Henry himself, like the rest of his story, rather than a "secret" meaning of the author's. (The case is similar to that of Krapp's black-white emblems.) Thus the religious dimensions of Henry's story points again to the pivotal ambiguity of the whole play: how much of what the audience experiences is really Henry's invention? Our examination has still not suggested the full extent of this ambiguity. Consider the opening of the play :

Henry : Sea scarcely audible.
Henry's boots on shingle. He Halts.
Sea a little louder.
On. (Sea. Voice louder.) On! (He moves on. Boots
on shingle. As he goes.) Stop! (He halts. Sea a
little louder.) Down. (Sea. Voice louder.)
Down!

The sea-sound is "given" (becoming progressively louder) and the sounds of the "boots on shingle" are introduced against it : is this perhaps not just another of the "hard" sounds Henry needs to set against the "sucking" sea sound? Is not the shingle another of his inventions? His instructions, "On!...Stop!...Down!", which we automatically assume to be exhortations of himself or his own body might after all be exhortations of his imagination. They might resemble the orders of a director to his sound-effects man. It is significant that the instructions come in pairs. The pattern occurs again^{and} again throughout the play :

On.(...Voice louder.) On!(...) Stop.(...louder.) Stop!
(...) Down (...Voice louder.) Down! (p.21)

Hooves! (Pause. Louder.) Hooves! (...) Again! (p.21)

Bolton (Pause. Louder.) Bolton. (p.23)

Holloway...(long pause...)...yes, Holloway. (p.23)

Bolton: 'Please! PLEASE!' (p.24)

A drip! A drip! (...) Again! (p.24)

'A washout, that's all you are, a washout!' (Violent slam of door. Pause.) Again! (Slam. Pause.)
Slam life shut like that! (p.25)

Ada. (Pause. Louder.) Ada! (p.26)

Ada! (Pause. Louder.) Ada! (Pause.) Christ! (Pause.)
Hooves! (Pause. Louder.) Hooves! (Pause.) Christ!
(Long pause.) (p.37)

And if, as this recurring pattern hints, the shingle is Henry's invention, that would confirm the fictiveness of the "sea", thus rendering the whole "geography" of the play an invention of the central, the only consciousness.

What, in the light (or half-light) of these instabilities, are we to make of the story of family disruption which underlies Henry's predicament, the train of events which led to the disappearance and probable suicide of his father? Is this really what happened to his father? "We never found your body, you know," remarks Henry, "that held up probate an unconscionable time, they said there was nothing to prove you hadn't run away from us all and alive and well under a false name in the Argentine for example, that grieved mother greatly."

The "for example" introduces a touch of self-consciousness which might go unnoticed were it not for Henry's later plans to escape the sea-sound : "Get away from it! Where it couldn't get at me! The Pampas! What?" Henry's father may by "in the Argentine for example" and Henry himself thinks about escaping to the Pampas.³¹ To suggest an implicit identification here of Henry with his father might be fanciful were it not for another, more telling, detail. Henry addresses his "silent" father: "You would never live this side of the bay, you wanted the sun on the water for that evening bathe you took once too often. But ^{en} what I got your money I moved across, as perhaps you may know" (p.22). Towards the end of the play Ada recalls Henry's father "sitting on a rock looking out to sea", but Henry finds a geographical anomaly when he takes up the story : "Left soon afterwards, passed you on the road, didn't see her, looking out to...(Pause.) Can't have been looking out to sea (Pause.) Unless you had gone round the other side. (Pause.) Had you gone round the cliff side? (Pause.) Father! (Pause.) Must have I suppose" (p.37). It is Ada's subtlest ploy: by sending Henry's father round the cliff side in her account, she identifies him with Henry who (perhaps in a gesture of independence) is now apparently living on that side of the bay. She seems to be trying to ⁱⁿduce in Henry his father's resignation just before the suicide, a resignation which combines in its physical appearance the solidity Henry craves with the

impending oblivion he fears: "Perhaps just the stillness, as if he had been turned to stone (p.36, my emphasis). And later: "Perhaps, as I said, just the great stillness of the whole body, as if all the breath had left it" (p.37). By the end of the play the identification of Henry and the fictional father is almost complete. Ada has described the sea: "Underneath all is as quiet as the grave. Not a sound. All day, all night, not a sound" (p.34); Henry's last words echo her: "Nothing, all day nothing. (Pause.) All day all night nothing. (Pause.) Not a sound." Finally we hear "sea", nothing else.

What is the implication of the identification of Henry with his father?

Embers opens with Henry trying to be with his father:

Who is beside me now? (Pause.) An old man, blind and foolish, (Pause.) My father back from the dead, to be with me. (Pause.) As if he hadn't died. (Pause.) No, simply back from the dead to be with me, in this strange place. (Pause.) Can he hear me? (Pause.) Yes, he must hear me. (Pause.) To answer me? (Pause.) No, he doesn't answer me. (Pause.) Just be with me.

(p.21)

As their names suggest, Ada and Addie may not be wife and daughter at all, not even imagined wife and daughter, only father-surrogates: Ada a near anagram of Dad and Addie a rhyme for Daddie. And Henry himself? Is this perhaps just another of the fictional characters? Ruby Cohn notes that "Henry" is a name derived from German Heimrich, meaning head of the family"³²: He too is a father or a father-surrogate - his own. Why should the figure of the father loom so large in every element of the play's symbolic structure? Because the father, the head of the family, is its creator, and it is creativity which is the need (or obligation) of Henry, or of the consciousness whose creator-surrogate

"Henry" is. "Henry" is a "provisional being", the "existence by proxy" (the phrase is Beckett's own) of the creator who is obliged to create himself.

Yet to conclude in such a way would be to lose sight of the ambiguity upon which, as Beckett himself pointed out, "Cendres repose". I have emphasised the more stylised, self-conscious elements of the play, because these elements, as the more difficult to register and understand, are the ones which need dwelling upon. But the important complementary emphasis needs to be made, here as in all Beckett's plays, on the elements of realism. The realism of Embers is important for the critic because it is important for Henry. His ability to maintain the realistic otherness of Ada and, indeed, of the silent father who is his imagined audience for part of the time, serves as an index of his creative powers. When these "other" presences desert him and he is finally left with his own voice ("You will be quite alone with your voice, there will be no other voice in the world but yours"), unable even to invoke the coconut-shell hooves, he knows that the end is approaching. It is the "Not I" situation in embryonic form. Not I but He or She or They. Henry's aim in multiplying the voices is indeed exactly this : realism. His need is to objectify himself and the Other, to make himself and his creations real.

Chapter Six : HAPPY DAYS

Written 1960-1 (Begun 8 October 1960) ; first performed
17 September 1961.¹

The hammer-and-nails names of the characters, the picture turned against the wall, the blood-stained handkerchief, the small boy who is (in the French version at least) like a dying Moses or a risen Christ....Endgame presents its audience with lots of "meanings" and significances. But of course the characters have been there before us :

Hamm : We're not beginning to...to...mean something?

Clov : Mean something! You and I, mean something! (Brief laugh.) Ah that's a good one!

(E, p.27)

The self-consciousness of Endgame is nothing if not thorough. It is a play which leaves the biter bitten, the critic criticised.

Happy Days dangles an even more succulent carrot in the shape of its stage-picture :

Expanse of scorched grass rising centre to low mound. Gentle slopes down to front and either side of stage. Back an abrupt fall to stage level. Maximum of simplicity and symmetry.

Blazing light.

Very pompier trompe - l'oeil backcloth to represent unbroken plain and sky receding to meet in far distance. Embedded up to above her waist in exact centre of mound, WINNIE. About fifty, well-preserved, blonde for preference, plump, arms and shoulders bare, low bodice, big bosom, pearl necklace, she is discovered sleeping, her arms on the ground before her, her head on her arms.²

The editors of A Student's Guide note :

Coe and Robinson both see Winnie's mound as Zeno's impossible heap of finite time (see also Endgame, p.12). It could also be regarded as an objectivization of Winnie's past, similar to Krapp's tape. Robinson also notes a parallel with Dante, which is probably intended by the playwright...³

One might add Eugene Webb: "The fact that Winnie is buried in the earth is a symbol both of the way the absurd is closing in on her as death approaches, making it harder and harder for her to find distractions for herself, and also of the way she has given up her freedom to objects outside herself by burying herself in that which is not herself."⁴ Or G.C. Barnard, for whom Winnie's mound is "symbolical of the accumulating days of her life".⁵ And so on.

Of course all these interpretations are plausible - none of them is actually wrong. But then we might take it for granted that Beckett himself is aware of the possible range of interpretations, and - more important - his awareness is in fact present within his specifications for the stage-set, thus making that stage-set into something different from that interpreted by the critics quoted above. The opening stage-directions specify explicitly not a realistic desert but a stylised one: "Maximum of simplicity and symmetry"; "very pompiere trompe-l'oeil backcloth to represent..." To represent, not to present in a realistic fashion. There is no aim to "deceive the eye": the set works against the willing suspension of disbelief. Implicit in this self-consciousness is a brooding concern with what the stage-picture may or may not mean. A well-known passage in the text (from one of Winnie's narratives) confirms this :

What's she doing? he says - What's the idea? he says -

stuck up to her diddies in the bleeding ground -
coarse fellow - What does it mean? he says -
What's it meant to mean? - and so on - lot more
stuff like that - usual drivel - Do you hear me?
he says - I do, she says, God help me - What do you
mean, he says, God help you?

(pp.32-3)

"As usual", comments A. Alvarez, "Beckett spikes the audience's guns".⁶

And yet it is not really "as usual" : the tone of the passage is far more insistent and irritated than that at the corresponding moments in Waiting for Godot. ("Inspiring prospects", WFG, p.14), and Endgame ("I see...a multitude...in transports...of joy", E,p.25). This is not some mordant whimsy but something approaching an attack on the spectator - even given its context within a narrative. Presuming, that is, that the intelligent spectator will inevitably raise the question of meaning when confronted with this stage-picture.

The stylisation of the stage-picture means that what Happy Days confronts the interpretator with is a parody of the "significant" visual image. It qualifies heavily any interpretation by implying a consciousness that any interpretation might be applied to itself.

The conventional approach of the critic - "what does this image suggest or mean?" - is forestalled; a different question must be asked: Why does this parody the "significant" image? The answer entails an examination of the play's most important cluster of themes.

At the end of his Act II monologue in Waiting for Godot Vladimir assures himself: "At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, He is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on." (WFG, p.91). He needs to feel that he is being perceived, just as he perceives Estragon. A few moments later, after telling the boy to tell Mr. Godot

"that you saw me", he bursts out: "You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me!" (WFG, p.92)

Winnie has the same need to feel that "someone is looking at me still. (...) Caring for me still.(...) That is what I find so wonderful.(...) Eyes on my eyes." (p.37). In Act I she has a "strange feeling" :

"Strange feeling that someone is looking at me. I am clear, then dim, then gone, then dim again, then clear again, and so on, back and forth, in and out of someone's eye." (p.31). Her own being alternates between clarity and dimness according to the blinking of the eye with which she is seen. Whose eye? The condition of theatre, as Alain Robbe-Grillet points out, is for the character to be there on the stage. But, we might add in the light of Vladimir's and Winnie's anxieties, it is also for the character to be seen to be there, and to feel that he or she is being seen to be there. Winnie is the archetypal player because she can only exist when she has an audience to play to. She embodies, even more obviously than the tramps of Godot, the Berkleian Esse est Percipi, and in a sense she stands for the condition of theatre itself. Without her audience, she ceases to exist: she is "guaranteed, genuine pure" actress; she is made up of her assumed role of garrulous bourgeois housewife. She is her role. Her audience on the stage, albeit a comically unwilling audience, is of course her husband Willie, and she constantly reiterates her need to feel perceived by him. Two of the most comical moments in Act I concern Winnie's efforts to ascertain whether or not Willie can actually hear and see her. And at the beginning of Act II she indulges in some strange reasoning :

I used to think...(pause)...I say I used to think that I would learn to talk alone. (Pause.) By that I mean to myself, the wilderness. (Smile.) But no. (Smile. Broader.) No no. (Smile off.) Ergo you are there. (Pause.) Oh no doubt you are dead, like the others, no

doubt you have died, or gone away and left me, like the others, it doesn't matter, you are there.

(pp.37-8)

When she is no longer so certain about the perceiving "presence" of Willie she resorts to self-perception, even though her own organs are in need of considerable help - she has to use spectacles and a magnifying glass - and she spends virtually the whole of Act I trying to read the legend on the handle of her toothbrush! In Act II she can no longer use her mirror (which she broke in Act I but assured us that "it will be in the bag again tomorrow, without a scratch, to help me through the day", p.30) because only her head protrudes from the mound of earth. Nevertheless she still tries her best to look at her own nose, her lips, tongue, eyebrows and cheeks.

But if Winnie feels that to be perceived is necessary for survival, it also raises problems. She confronts these problems in her first story. Just after she has her "strange feeling that someone is looking" at her there "floats up" into Winnie's "mind's eye" an image of the "last human kind - to stray this way" (p.33), "a Mr. Shower - a Mr. and perhaps a Mrs. Shower - no - they are holding hands - his fiancée then more likely - or just some - loved one".

Winnie turns to Willie :

Shower - Shower - does the name mean anything - to you, Willie - evoke any reality, I mean - for you, Willie - don't answer if you don't - feel up to it - you have done more - than your bit - already - Shower - Shower...Yes - Shower - Shower - (...) - or Cooker, perhaps I should say Cooker (...) Cooker, Willie, does Cooker strike a chord? (...) Cooker, Willie, does Cooker ring a bell, the name Cooker?

(pp.31-2)

The names do, as Elin Diamond has pointed out,⁷ mean something and evoke a reality: A Shower - German Schauer (and schauen-kuchen) - is a looker, someone, perhaps, who will cook the object with a look (like the sun's eye). This does not supply any new information about Mr. Shower or Cooker; it merely confirms his function in the story as someone who "gapes" at Winnie. But, as with Krapp's taped "memories" (and Winnie's recollection too purports to be factual), "meaning" is only half the story. The most obvious thing about the passage is its air of carrot-dangling self-consciousness, complete with feeble jokes ("does Cooker ring a bell...?"). The mocking self-consciousness suggests that Winnie herself knows what Shower (Schauer) means and that the story is nothing so much as an elaborate means of teasing Willie. Other self-conscious details suggest that the "memory" is being invented, in some degree, for a particular purpose: "Strange thing, time like this, drift up into the mind" (p.31), remarks Winnie at one point, and, ostensibly about her nails but just as she is setting out on the story: "Very brittle today." (p.31). Whatever the case, one important point about the Shower-Cooker story is that it is aimed specifically at Willie, who is the only audience Winnie is aware of.

Winnie continues her story by recalling Mr. Shower-Cooker's nagging questions about what she is doing, what she "means" and what she is "meant to mean". Suddenly she stops filing her nails (she has been doing this since the story began), raises her head and "gazes front":

And you, she says, what's the idea of you,
 she says, what are you meant to mean? ~~It is~~
 because you're still on your two flat feet,
 with your old ditty full of tinned muck and
 changes of underwear, dragging me up and down
 this fornicating wilderness, coarse creature,
 fit mate - (with sudden violence) - let go of
 my hand and drop for God's sake, she says, drop!
 (Pause. Resumes filing.)

(pp.3-3)

This creator-God(dess) is, very aptly, filing her fingernails rather than paring them ("very brittle today"), but her affected detachment - the "coarse creature" and his "fit mate" are both seen as contemptible - cannot prevent Winnie's identification of herself with the woman. It is revealed in her acting of the woman's "sudden violence", an acting which is, like Hamm's in Endgame, a pseudo-acting: The "acted" scream of the woman to Mr. Shower-Cooker to let go of her hand is Winnie's own scream at her Schauer-Kucher, her audience - Willie. The woman's denunciation of Mr. Shower-Cooker's assumptions of personal meaning emerges by implication as Winnie's denunciation of her theatre-audience, certainly, but it makes itself felt in its immediate dramatic context as a raging against Willie, for, as we have noted, he is the audience within the play.

The identification of Willie with Mr. Shower-Cooker is an oblique one. Willie does not say a great deal in the play, but one might conjecture that if he were to speak he would reveal a mentality similar to that of the "coarse creature" of Winnie's fiction. He carries on in this "desert" landscape as he would anywhere else: reading the paper, picking his nose, looking at his dirty postcards, all the time ignoring the wife who craves his attention - though occasionally obliging her by going in and out of his "hole". Indeed he seems content with his lot - at one stage he even ventures a joke rather than a grunt ("Castrated male swine", p.35). And, as one might expect, he doesn't like being disturbed: that tends to make him surly. He is the hen-pecked husband of comedy, in fact: "Oh I know you were never one to talk, I worship you Winnie be mine and then nothing from that day forth only titbits from Reynold's News." (p.46). Mr. Shower-Cooker is certainly "one to talk" - he is his creator's creature in that; indeed he makes himself felt as both the opposite of and complementary to his counterpart in "reality": one is a talking looker,

the other a silent listener. Hence perhaps Winnie's initial teasing of Willie with the names.

The precise identification of the "fictional" man with the "real" man and the "fictional" woman with the "real" woman is, however, less important than the congruence of relationships in the "fictional" and "real" worlds. The emblem of that relationship in Winnie's story is of course the joining of hands. The woman's order to "drop!" would seem at first to mean "drop my hand!", but the exact context - "let go of my hand and drop" (my emphasis) - suggests something rather more drastic. The missing word is supplied when Winnie returns to the story in Act II :

I call to the eye of the mind...Mr. Shower-
or Cooker. (She closes her eyes. Bell rings
loudly. She opens her eyes. Pause.) Hand in
hand, in the other hands bags. (Pause.)
Getting on...in life. (Pause.) No longer
young, not yet old. (Pause.) Standing there
gaping at me. (Pause.) Can't have been a bad
bosom, he says, in its day. (Pause.) Seen
worse shoulders, he says, in my time. (Pause.)
Does she feel her legs? he says. (Pause.) Is
there any life in her legs? he says. (Pause.)
Has she anything on underneath? he says. (Pause.)
Ask her, he says, I'm shy. (Pause.) Ask her what?
she says. (Pause.) Is there any life in her legs.
(Pause.) Has she anything on underneath. (Pause.)
Ask her yourself, she says. (Pause. With sudden
violence.) Let go of me for Christ sake and drop!
(Pause. Do.) Drop dead! (Smile.) But no. (Smile
broad.) No no. (Smile off.) I watch them recede.
(Pause.) Hand in hand - and the bags. (Pause.)
Dim. (Pause.) Then gone. (Pause.) Last human kind -
to stray this way.

(pp.43-4)

The Act I "let go of my hand and drop for God's sake, she says, drop!" has become "Let go of me for Christ sake and drop!...Drop dead!" The first outburst retains the trace of its narrative context in "she says" (and the comma -pauses which go with this); the second is unreported,

as if wrenched from its context by Winnie, and consequently it hints strongly at Winnie's identification with the woman. "God" has become "Christ" (not even the correct "Christ's"), the final hope, and "drop!" has become what it always promised to be: "Drop dead!" Detached from the rest of the sentence by a pause, "Drop dead!" becomes Winnie's wish for her companion, since it is only when Willie ceases to perceive her, when his organs of perception "let go" of her, that she will be released. Only then will she cease to exist. The joined hands of Mr. Shower-Cooker and his lady-friend form the emblem in Winnie's story of the relationship of perception between herself and Willie. The story, like Hamm's "chronicle", stands as a counterpoint to the stage-situation. In matters of detail it is teasingly similar and yet ultimately dissimilar: there is a man and a woman, but they are not, apparently, man and wife; they carry bags with "kind of big brown grips" (p.32), whereas Winnie's own bag is black; Winnie identifies herself with the woman implicitly, but the man is strangely like and unlike Willie - he is voluble where Willie is silent and domineering where Willie is grudgingly submissive; Mr. Shower-Cooker and his "fiancée" are mobile where Winnie and Willie are static (it is as though Vladimir and Estragon had invented a story about Pozzo and Lucky). Such details are tantalising, but the essential concern - the relationship signified by the emblem of the joined hands - is clear enough.

Initially then, the Shower-Cooker story dramatises Winnie's need to be perceived: Winnie imagines herself being looked at. But unfortunately survival-existence-does not stop there. The question of meaning arises: "What's she doing?...What's the idea?...stuck up to her diddies in the bleeding ground...What does it mean?...What's it meant to mean?..." There is no answer, and Winnie can only retort by

undermining the complacent standpoint of the questioner, projecting her "sudden violence" onto another fictional creation: "And you,... what's the idea of you,...What are you meant to mean? It is because you're still on your two flat feet, with your old ditty full of tinned muck and changes of underwear, dragging me up and down this fornicating wilderness..." The syntax breaks down under pressure of disgust. The point being made through the fictional woman is that the difference between Winnie and the ordinary "bourgeois" such as Mr. Shower or Cooker is only one of degree, not one of kind: mobile or immobile, there is the same absence of meaning, and only a person who did not realise that would ask in the first place "What does it mean?...What's it meant to mean?" This is the question which Winnie is at every moment endeavouring to repress and dissolve, since there is no real solution. It is just that her situation invites the question of meaning where Mr. Shower-Cooker's, though equally meaningless despite the gift of mobility which is conferred upon him, does not. (Just as the existence of Pozzo and Lucky, though they are apparently going somewhere, is no more meaningful than that of Vladimir and Estragon, who are not going anywhere.)

The Shower-Cooker story, with the "sudden violence" of its climax, "let go of my hand and drop for God's sake, she says, drop!", dramatises the impulse in Winnie towards annihilation, her desire, that is, to break the bond of perception which is represented by the joined hands of the fictional couple. And yet the existence of the story itself implies the opposite impulse, just as every one of Winnie's fictions, every one of her words ("no truth in it anywhere", p.38) embodies, if feebly, her instinct for survival. Her attitude towards creativity, and the contradiction which is involved in that attitude, is best exemplified, strange as it may

seem, by her comments on the parasol she is still able to hold up in Act I: "I am weary, holding it up, and I cannot put it down. (Pause.) I am worse off with it up than with it down, and I cannot put it down. (Pause.) Reason says, Put it down, Winnie, it is not helping you, put the thing down and get on with something else.

(Pause.) I cannot." (p.28). As the inevitability of "and I cannot put it down" (rather than the expected "but I cannot...") suggests, Winnie is obliged to create fictions (which include fictions of meaning) in order to survive, to keep at bay the void of identity which is at the centre of her role-playing, even though "words fail, there are times when even they fail" (p.20). Creativity is the third term in Winnie's vital triangle. In order to maintain a sense of her own existence she needs not only to feel that she is being perceived but also actively to create images of herself which will serve as "vice-existences" in the absence of "guaranteed, genuine, pure" being (the legend on the toothbrush is not insignificant). Perception is no less crucial to her creative capacity than to her sense of existence - in fact we might say that, since her existence depends upon a continual though futile act of self-creation, creativity is her existence. The importance of creativity is suggested by the illuminating self-correction at the beginning of Act II: "I used to think...(pause) I say I used to think that I would learn to talk alone." (my emphasis). Even the assurance is an invention. Winnie's tendency to enact what she is saying when she lights on this subject is illustrated by a remarkable passage in Act I, when a characteristic contribution by Willie releases in her a torrent of verbal energy:

Willie : (violently). Fear no more!

Winnie : (normal voice, gabbled). Bless you
Willie I do appreciate your goodness I
know what an effort it costs you, now
you may relax I shall not trouble you

again unless I am obliged to, by that I mean unless I come to the end of my own resources which is most unlikely, just to know that in theory you can hear me even though in fact you don't is all I need, just to feel you there within earshot and conceivably on the qui vive is all I ask, not to say anything I would not wish you to hear or liable to cause you pain, not to be just babbling away on trust as it were not knowing and something gnawing at me. (Pause for breath.) Doubt. (Places index and second finger on heart area, moves them about, brings them to rest.) Here. (Moves them slightly.) Abouts. (Hand away.) Oh no doubt the time will come when before I can utter a word I must make sure you heard the one that went before and then no doubt another come another time when I must learn to talk to myself a thing I could never bear to do such wilderness. (Pause.) Or gaze before me with compressed lips. (She does so.) All day long.

(pp.21-2)

Assured of the bond of perception by Willie's repetition of the Shakespeare she had been quoting ("Fear no more the heat o' the sun" - as if it could have been anything else!), Winnie feels a fresh creative spring. Indeed, as we should expect, many of her fictions purport to be memories of relationships. There are her first two balls with "a Mr. Johnson, or Johnston, or perhaps I should say Johnstone" and her first kiss "within a toolshed, those^{ugh} whose I cannot conceive" (p.15) - the pervasive innuendo suggests an imaginative contrivance on Winnie's part. Or thoughts of her youth: "All I can say is for my part is that for me they are not what they were when I was young and...foolish and...(faltering, head down) ...beautiful...possibly...lovely...in a way...to look at (p.27. My emphasis). The fictions begin to wear thin: "The sunshade you gave me...that day...(Pause)...that day...the lake...the reeds. (Eyes front. Pause.) What day? (Pause.) What reeds? (p.39). She is clutching at straws, as in her "memory" of a party: "That day.

(Pause.) The pink fizz. (Pause.) The flute glasses. (Pause.)

The last guest gone. (Pause.) The last bumper with the bodies nearly touching. (Pause.) The look. (Long pause.) What day?

(Long pause.) What look? (p.45) But of course all these fictions are subsumed by the parody presence we have in front of us, the "Winnie" invention, "embedded up to above her waist in exact centre of mound,,,About fifty, well-preserved, blond for preference, plump, arms and shoulders bare, low bodice, big bosom, pearl necklace". For even Winnie is a "provisional being", subsisting - and barely subsisting - on behalf of some larger consciousness.

The bond of perception between "wife" and "husband" which is so essential to Winnie's creativity finds its most obvious yet at the same time most bizarre parallel in images of sexual activity and relationships. These matters are transacted beneath the surface, that is, in terms of innuendo, though there are open references to sex, such as the episode of Willie's dirty postcards: "Make any nice-minded person want to vomit!" comments Winnie after inspection. "What does that creature in the background think he's doing?...Oh no really" (pp.16-17). And of course Willie himself is precisely this, "a creature in the background" as we look at the stage. He might even be, in his own long-awaited definition of a hog, a "castrated male swine". (p.35. This delights Winnie.) The rest is innuendo, more or less blatant, as in Winnie's first sexual experience, which is with Mr. Johnstone in a toolshed, though "we had no toolshed and he most certainly had no toolshed" (p.15). Or Willie's splendid newspaper advertisement: "Opening for smart youth" (p.14). Willie's name is not without reference to one of his functions, as the following sequence might suggest:

"My arms...My breasts..What arms?...What breasts?..Willie...
What Willie?...My Willie!"⁸(p.38). The clearest link between
sexual and artistic creativity is made by Winnie in Act II :

Simply cannot sing. (Pause.) Not a note.
(Pause.) Another thing, Willie, while we
are on this subject. (Pause.) The sadness
after song. (Pause.) Have you run across
that, Willie? (Pause.) In the course of
your experience. (Pause.) No? (Pause.)
Sadness after intimate sexual intercourse
one is familiar with of course. (Pause.)
You would concur with Aristotle there,
Willie, I fancy. (p.42)

The play with the idea of Willie running ("run across...in the
course...you would concur") carries over to the final scene, where
he appears crawling on all fours to execute what is suggested by
innuendo to be a parody intercourse: "Do you want to touch my
face...again? (Pause.) Is it a kiss you're after, Willie, or is
it something else? (Pause.) There was a time when I could have
given you a hand. (Pause.) And then a time before that again when I
did give you a hand. (Pause.) You were always in dire need of a hand,
Willie" (p.47). The parody intercourse parallels the perceptual
intercourse which is emphasised from Willie's first appearance round
the mound, a parody Englishman "dressed to kill - top hat, morning
coat, striped trousers etc., white gloves in hand. Very long
bushy Battle of Britain moustache" (p.45), when Winnie comments:
"What a get up, you do look a sight!" - up to the final stage direction:
"They look at each other. Long pause" (p.48). At one point Winnie
even implores: "Don't look at me like that!" (p.47). It is
something she might have said to Mr. Shower-Cooker - or her audience
in the theatre. Her poignant song ("Every touch of fingers/Tells
me what I know...") makes itself felt as the fruit of this intercourse,

perceptual and (parodically) sexual; hence the "sadness after song".

Sex rears its head, too, in the frenzied Act II version of the Shower-Cooker story, when the man, taking up his Act I innuendo "What good is she [Winnie] to him [Willie] like that?" (p.33), pokes around pruriently: "Has she anything on underneath?" (p.43). But its strangest occurrence is in Winnie's other story (which she tells only in Act II), the one about Mildred and the mouse. Winnie refers to this fiction as an ultimate, a last chance: "There is my story of course, when all else fails" (p.11). "My story" is both "the story which belongs to me" and "the story which is about me" - not necessarily about Winnie directly, but bearing some important relation to her existential situation. (And Winnie was indeed called Mildred in one early draft of Happy Days.) The Milly-fiction is in fact another self-image, another attempt by Winnie to make herself.

It is "a life...A long life." "Beginning in the womb, where life used to begin, Mildred has memories, she will have memories, of the womb, before she dies, the mother's womb". The emphasis on the womb is not a gratuitous detail, as the topographical facts of the first part of the story make clear.

The sun was not well up when Milly rose,
descended the steep...(pause)...slipped
on her nightgown, descended all alone the
steep wooden stairs, backwards on all fours,
though she had been forbidden to do so,
entered the...(pause)...tiptoed down the
silent passage, entered the nursery and began
to undress Dolly. (Pause.) Crept under the
table and began to undress Dolly. (Pause.)
Scolding her...the while.

(p.41)

If we are in any doubt that this, the retreat downwards and through the "silent passage" into the nursery and, foetally, under the table,

is an image of a willed regression to the womb, that doubt is dispelled by a parallel episode in Act I:

Go back into your hole now, Willie, you've exposed yourself enough. (Pause.) Do as I say, Willie, don't lie sprawling there in this hellish sun, go back into your hole. (Pause.) Go on now, Willie. (Willie invisible starts crawling left towards hole.) That's the man. (She follows his progress with her eyes.) Not head first, stupid, how are you going to turn? (Pause.) That's it...right round...now...back in. (Pause.) Oh I know it is not easy dear, crawling backwards, but it is rewarding in the end.

(p.21)

Willie's parody womb-regression (followed later by his parody birth, pp. 34-5, "opening for smart youth"!) has the same insistence on mobility "backward on all fours" as the Milly story. And the relation between the rhyming characters does not stop there. If the details of the sun, which "was not well up", and the "scolding" of the doll belong to Winnie, Milly's "big waxen dolly" resembles Willie: he has a straw boater and the doll has "a little white straw hat with a chin elastic" and, most important of all, the doll's "china blue eyes that open and shut" (like the eyes which Winnie feels are on her) recall Willie's "old blue eyes like saucers" (p.22). The identifications are not neat (the doll, for example, has Winnie's "pearly necklace"), but we might suggest at this stage that the Dolly is to Milly what Willie is to Winnie.

The idea of parody womb-regression and birth is reinforced by the fact that, when Winnie breaks off her story to assure herself that Willie is still listening, she says "to herself": "God grant he did not go in head foremost! (Eyes right, loud.) You're not stuck, Willie? (Pause. Do.) You're not jammed, Willie? (Eyes front, distressed.) Perhaps he is crying out for help all this time and I do not hear

him!" (p.42). The cries, of the being struggling to be properly born, take us forward to the climax of the story, which follows only after a long interruption for Winnie to consider "the sadness after song" and the prurient pokings of Mr. Shower-Cooker. Sex is in the air, or rather, under the ground. The climax of the Shower-Cooker story leads inevitably into the climax of the Milly story:

(With sudden violence.) Let go of me for Christ sake and drop! (Pause Do.) Drop dead! (Smile.) But no. (Smile broadens.) No no. (Smile off.) I watch them recede. (Pause.) Hand in hand - and the bags. (Pause.) Dim. (Pause.) Then gone. (Pause.) Last human kind - to stray this way. (Pause.) Up to date. (Pause.) And now? (Pause. Low) Help. (Pause. Do.) Help, Willie. (Pause. Do.) No? (Long pause. Narrative.) Suddenly a mouse...(Pause.) Suddenly a mouse ran up her little thigh and Mildred, dropping Dolly in the fright, began to scream - (Winnie gives a sudden piercing scream) - and screamed and screamed - (Winnie screams twice)- screamed and screamed and screamed and screamed till all came running, in their night attire, papa, mamma, Bibby and...old Annie, to see what was the matter...(pause)...what on earth could possibly be the matter. (Pause.) Too late. (Pause.) Too late. (Long pause. Just audible.) Willie.

(p.44)

What is important in this passage is the essential continuity of its elements. The Shower-Cooker story, the appeal to Willie and the mouse-episode, these bear a crucial metaphorical relation to each other. The Shower-Cooker story culminates in the woman's appeal to be released by the man from the bond of perception which is represented by the joined hands: "Drop dead!". They would both "die" if unperceived. But with an artificial smile ("Smile...broader...off") Winnie quells the "sudden violence", which was hers as well as her creations, at the same time denying the appeal for release: "No no". As the fictional couple fades from the mind (in the present: "I watch them recede...")

she is even more acutely aware of her need to be perceived. She turns to Willie, but, getting no answer, she resorts to her story which, as well as serving to plug the void, also presents an image of the predicament she now faces: the feeling of no longer being perceived. The mouse which runs up Milly's thigh makes her drop Dolly - and this dropping echoes the Shower-Cooker woman's "drop!...Drop dead!" which Winnie has denied - so that Milly without Dolly is now like Winnie without Willie. Neither of them feels perceived, and as the void closes in Winnie screams repeatedly, for both of them. The scream is part of the narrative, certainly (but how do you scream in a "narrative tone"?), but its dual function is confirmed a few moments later when Willie does appear. "Did you not hear me screaming for you?" asks Winnie (p.46).

The mouse is disturbing and puzzling. We are told that Milly had been forbidden to descend the steep wooden stairs (presumably because of mice in the nursery), thus the mouse might be seen as having something to do with a punishment for wishing to regress to the womb. Or again, the mouse causes Milly to drop Dolly, that is, to break the bond of perception (here, the holding of the doll), so that it might be seen - obscurely but I think more plausibly - as an image created by Winnie of the void of identity which assaults her when she is no longer perceived. If this is so, the void is conceived of as an obscene sexual violation of innocence (though the actual defloration, if that is what it is, is censored out), a violation which is also a moment of birth - a characteristically Beckettian juxtaposition: the screams echoing the screams of the "jammed" Willie which Winnie thought she might be missing, are the vagitus. When the parents, relative and nanny come running, it is already "too late". Thus birth is imagined as the punishment for the "crime" of womb-regression.

What is the relation of this to what we have in front of us?

Invert the stage picture and call Winnie's mound a mons veneris: we have yet another image - following those in Waiting for Godot and All That Fall - of the imperfect birth. The trouble with Winnie is that she has never been really born. One of Beckett's abiding obsessions is imaged, albeit in disguised form, in a stage-picture. There are problems here, of course, Winnie is being progressively buried, not released: the play makes that concession to realism! Nevertheless Winnie herself has the opposite idea:

Is gravity what it was, Willie, I fancy not.
(Pause.) Yes, the feeling more and more that
if I were not held - (gesture) - in this way,
I would simply float up into the blue. (Pause.)
And that perhaps some day the earth will yield
and let me go, the pull is so great, yes, crack
all round me and let me out.

(p.26)

And no doubt this, the imperfect birth, is yet another "meaning" the stage-picture anticipates our seeing, thus it includes such an interpretation and parodies it. Let us return to our initial question: Why is the stage-picture a parody of meaning or meanings? Because, since Winnie's existence is only a "vice-existence", a parody of being, any meaning which might be assigned to her either by herself or by a spectator will inevitably be a parody of meaning. Interpretation is thus forestalled and shut off by the nature of "existence", which is parody. That "existence" is parody is implicit in the form and content of all Beckett's work (but here form is content; content is form). Happy Days, perhaps the most obviously parodic of all the plays, hammers home the point.

Chapter Seven : CASCANDO

French version : Written 1962; first broadcast 13 October 1963.

English version : Translated 1964?; first broadcast 6 October 1964.

Embers moves inwards, away from the charming rural "setting" of All That Fall, with its proliferation of local "characters" towards the threatening oceans of the mind. The later play does not, however, exclude the external world. Rather, "nature" is compromised and rendered an ambiguous presence (even more so than in the stylised cluckings, barkings, mooings, baaings and chirpings of All That Fall) by being partially internalised: Henry's sea is in his head; it is impossible to tell if he really is on the sea shore. The play takes place, as it were, on the borders of the protagonist's mind. We cannot determine what is "real" and of the external world, and what is not. The inward movement from All That Fall to Embers is also a movement towards abstraction. The drive towards abstraction, the unrelenting focus on the creating mind at the expense of an attempted "realistic" representation of its creations (which provides the ambiguity of Embers), culminates in Cascando, Beckett's last radio play to date.

The structural basis of Cascando is the same dualistic conception of the artistic process that we find in Words and Music, Theatre II, Radio I and Radio II (broadcast under the title Rough for Radio). These plays were written, in French, seemingly in a cluster in the

early 'sixties and are recognisably variations on a single theme. But although Beckett has always conceived of the creative process as being dual in nature, he seems to have found more than usual difficulty at this time in conceiving workable images of this duality. Or perhaps he was more than usually oppressed by his omnipresent consciousness that no single conceivable image is any more adequate to the ontological truth of his creative predicament than any other. For this is precisely what these plays are about, and though they might best be regarded as a sloughing-off, Beckett's "reculer à mieux sauter", their centrality to his aims and concerns needs to be emphasised. Nevertheless, with the exception of Cascando, they do I think lack the economy and refinement of truly "finished" works.¹ Their history seems to suggest as much. Five shorter plays from the early sixties have so far emerged (according to the author, they are all "circa 1960"), four for radio and one for the stage; two (Cascando and Words and Music) were translated, broadcast and published more or less immediately but three were jettisoned and were translated and published (as sketches or drafts) only in the 1977 collection Ends and Odds.

I have suggested that refinement is one of the characteristics of a "finished" Beckett work. What we know about Beckett's compositional process - and that is an ever-increasing amount - suggests an habitual movement from initial, crude ideas to an eventually refined end-product, which generally means a movement from explicitness to suggestiveness (a process which Stanley Gontarski terms "vaguening"²) and an elimination of blatant details and obtrusive "meanings" (as is evidenced by Ruby Cohn's account of "The Beginnings of Endgame"³). Such factors suggest that (for example) Radio II, is best regarded as an

early draft of an unfinished work. (Beckett gave it the title Rough for Radio when it was broadcast not just as a joke about its brutal central image but to indicate its "rough", unfinished state.) The chief weakness of this play is the crude over-explicitness of its central image - the bound-and-gagged voice (Fox/Vox) coerced by being whipped. The conception is so concrete that the play tends to fight against the fundamentally abstract medium for which it was conceived. We saw that Embers, full of "realistic" detail though it is, nonetheless, "repose sur une ambiguïté: le personnage a-t-il une hallucination ou est-il présence de la réalité? La réalisation scénique détruisant l'ambiguïté". A great part of the roughness of Radio II is that there is no real ambiguity about reality to be destroyed, only a few jokes. "With its unity of place and time", writes Martin Esslin,

Rough for Radio would be fairly easy to produce on the stage. This is another indication of the rough state of the work. Cascando, which contains many of the elements roughly present here in a far more refined state, being more abstract in its subtlety and perfection, is essentially radiophonic. Rough for Radio by comparison is, if not naturalistic, at least more earthbound, far more material, more palpable in its concept.⁴

Cascando has no incidental sounds, only voices and music. There is nothing so concrete even as a proper name, only Opener, Voice and Music - and the one proper name we do hear is obviously stylised. What the Opener opens and closes (apart from Voice and Music) might be taken to be some sort of door (letting in his lackeys) but we never hear anything. The relationship between Opener and Voice/Music is never endowed with a human context, as is the relationship between the Animator and Fox in Radio II or (more

economically) that between Croak and Bob/Joe in Words and Music. The relationships in those plays are not necessarily always humane, but they are recognisably human: there is a master, more or less brutal, and there are his slaves, more or less servile (though Croak refers to Bob and Joe as his "comforts" and his "balms", pp.29/30). But the more concrete the context, the harder it is for the playwright to reveal the real nature of the relationship between master and servant - one that is gradually discovered to be far more intimate and terrible than we had ever thought. (Radio II is especially weak at this juncture.) Cascando sacrifices a concrete human context to radiophonic abstraction, and because it does so, gains appreciably in its delineation of the exact relationship between Opener and Voice/Music - which is now recognisably a psychic relationship. The play is concerned above all with what is "in his head"; in no other Beckett play do we get such a strong impression of being "needless to say in a skull"⁵, listening to the split-off segments of a single mind.

We are plunged immediately into the inner world. A "cold" voice, the Opener's, declares: "It is the month of May...for me. (Pause.) Correct." (p.39). The month in the outside world is an irrelevancy; the inner May means hope and renewal ("for me"). Voice, "low, panting", is opened:

- story...if you could finish it...you could rest...sleep...not before...oh I know...the ones I've finished...thousands and one...all I ever did...in my life...with my life...saying to myself...finish this one...it's the right one...then rest...sleep...no more stones...no more words...and finished it...and not the right one...

(p.39)

This is the nearest to the tone and rhythm of The Unnamable we have

yet come, or indeed shall come, in the plays. Like Fox in Radio II, Voice is searching out the right "sign or set of words" which constitutes the "right story: the paradoxical encapsulation of that real being which is oblivion. He starts this time on a "different" story - different because it really promises to be the right one ("I've got it") - about an old man called Woburn (Woe-born; the French original has Maunu - "naked misery"). Voice seems familiar with Woburn:

Woburn...I resume...a long life...already...
say what you like...a few misfortunes...that's
enough...five years later...ten...I don't know
...Woburn...he's changed...not enough...
recognizable...in the shed...yet another...
waiting for night...night to fall... to go
out...go on...elsewhere...sleep elsewhere...

(p.39)

As Woburn "slips out" of his shed Opener closes for the first time and then, bringing in Music, declares: "I open the door" (p.40). Or rather, the printed text has him declare that. Actually this is a misprint for the more obvious "I open the other." ⁶ Nevertheless the error is a useful one, since it underlines the verbal counterpoint which suggests the relation between Opener, Voice/Music and the "fiction" Woburn. That Woburn is a concrete image of the abstract Voice is fairly plain - hence the familiarity and the comment "he's changed...not enough" - but the Opener's misprint-opening of "the door" serves to connect him too with Woburn, since the old man has to "open the door" in order to slip out of his shed. The misprint merely reminds us that the Opener and Woburn are both "openers", whatever it is that each has to open. This detail of counterpoint, erroneous though it is in one particular, nonetheless hints at the ineradicable connections which will imperil the Opener's detachment ("cold") and eventually unite him with the "low panting"

of Voice and Music.

It is night when Woburn "slips out" in the "same old coat" (an allusion, perhaps, to the classical image of language as the clothing or vestment of thought); "right the sea...left the hills... he has the choice..." (p.40). The pun on "right" ("It's the right one") indicates that the choice is a foregone conclusion. As in Embers, but here unequivocally, the sea symbolises oblivion, dedifferentiation. Exhorting himself to follow Woburn ("don't lose him"), Voice charts the old man's painful, stumbling progress - a progress which is of course the equivalent of Voice's breathless, staggering syntax :

hands flat...in the mud...head sunk...then up...
on his feet...huge bulk...come on...he goes on...
he goes down...come on...in his head...what's in
his head...a hole...a shelter...a hollow...in the
dunes,,,a cave...vague memory...in his head...a
of cave...he goes down...no more trees...no more
bank...he's changed...not enough...night too bright
...soon the dunes...no more cover...not a soul...
not -

Silence. (p.41)

"Voice and Woburn", writes Katharine Worth, "have to be taken unequivocally as projections of the Opener, Woburn being the furthest he can get away from himself".⁷ But if he is the furthest, he is also the nearest: fiction turns back on itself in a characteristically Beckettian contortion and joins itself to fact, or what seems at first to be fact. In Voice's narration inner and outer worlds become confused. "What's in his head...a hole..." A hole in his head? Apparently not: it is a "vague memory" of "a shelter...a hollow...in the dunes...a cave", Woburn's vague memory. But the ambiguity extends inwards: "What's in his head...a hole...
a shelter...a hollow..."⁸ In Woburn's head there is a vague memory

of a cave; but in someone's head there is a vague memory which is a cave, "a shelter". Hence the strange construction "a of cave", a grammatical dislocation which throws together the memory and the cave by missing out "vague memory", so that the memory becomes the cave.

In whose head? "They say, It's in his head," quotes the Opener: "No I open" (p.42). It is his first denial of an accusation which haunts him: that Voice is not separate from him but is "in his head". "He seems to be resisting that suggestion", writes Katharine Worth, "by cultivating an impersonal, automaton - like style... and ushering in and cutting off Voice and Music as if he had no more to do with them than that".⁹ But the "suggestion" starts to creep into Voice's story; the something in Woburn's head can be safely admitted :

night too bright...say what you like...
sea louder...thunder...manes of foam...
Woburn...his head...what's in his head...
peace...peace again...in his head...no
further...no more searching...sleep...

(p.42)

Opener's nervous refusal to admit that Voice and Music are "in his head" is the result of a deeply ambivalent attitude towards the last "sleep", which is both desired and feared. It is as though Voice were the part of the personality which desires sleep and Opener the part which fears it but cannot brook the invasion of desire. Yet it is not as simple as that: perhaps it is a matter of emphasis rather than of distinction, since Voice remains a projection of Opener. The repeated "say what you like" of the one is a breathless echo of the other's rebarbative attitude towards

"Them".

Opener : What do I open?
They say, He opens nothing, he has
nothing to open, it's in his head.
They don't see me, they don't see what I
do, they don't see what I have, and they
say, He opens nothing, he has nothing to
open, it's in his head.
I don't protest anymore, I don't say anymore,
There is nothing in my head. I don't
answer anymore.
I open and close.

Voice : - lights...of the land...the island...
the sky...he need only...lift his head...
his eyes...he'd see them...shine on him...
but no...he -

Silence.

Music : (brief) - - - - -

Silence.

Opener : They say, That is not his life, he does
not live on that. They don't see me, they
don't see what my life is, they don't see
what I live on, and they say, That is not
his life, he does not live on that.

Pause.

I have lived on it...till I'm old.
Old enough.
Listen.

(p.43)

The juxtaposition is a significant one since it underlines the
large structural counterpoint upon which the play is founded :
Voice's assertion that Woburn "need only lift his head" in order
to see the lights functions as a commentary on the Opener's refusal
to acknowledge Voice as his own, presumably alienated from him,

"in his head". The increasing defensiveness and mounting paranoia of the Opener's assertions ("They say...They don't see. they don't see ...I don't protest...I don't answer..."), their tone and rhythm so nervous and disturbed, only serve to convince us of the truth of "their" suggestion. Indeed we, the radio audience, are included in "them", since we "don't see" him either. His manner of protest only escalates with "I don't protest anymore, I don't say anymore." The Opener too might receive illumination if he only lifted the head inside which Voice is, "but no..." We can even feel Voice expending some of his effort in encouraging Opener, as well as Woburn :

Voice : (weakening). - this time...I'm there...
Woburn...it's him...I've seen him...
I've got him...come on...same old coat...
he goes down...falls...falls again...on
purpose or not...can't see...he's down...
that's what counts...come on -

Opener : (with Voice). Full strength. (pp.43-4)

It is a strange sort of mutual encouragement. Opener has "opened the door", but neither he nor Voice feels able to go through it first: each stands in the doorway waiting for the other to enter. The problem is pinpointed by Voice's inability to control the movements of what seemed at first to be a fictional character. He can only follow Woburn ("I've got him"); he cannot even tell whether the old man falls "on purpose or not", just as - and this is the mirror image - he cannot tell if the Opener's refusal to end (his withholding of the truth about Voice) is "on purpose or not". Woburn's fall is an image of the Opener's hesitation to end, his clinging to existence.

Opener opens Voice and Music and comments: "From one world to another, it's as though they drew together. We have not much further to go. Good" (p.44). As in Radio I ("It's crazy! Like one!" EAO, p.90) and Words and Music, the harmony of the creative elements signals the approaching end, which is simultaneously an ideal harmony and a silence. Hurrying towards this end, Voice finds Woburn in a boat :

Voice: - no tiller...no thwarts...no oars...
afloat...sucked out¹⁰...then back...
aground...drags free...out...Woburn...
he fills it...flat out...face in the
bilge...arms spread...same old coat...
hands clutching...in the gunnels...no...
I don't know...I see him...he clings on...
out to sea...heading nowhere...for the
island...then no more...else -
Silence.

Music: - - - - -
Silence.

Opener: They said, It's his own, it's his voice,
it's in his head.
Pause.

Voice: - faster...out...driving out...rearing...
plunging...heading nowhere...for the island
...then no more...elsewhere...anywhere...
heading anywhere...lights -
Silence.

Opener: No resemblance.
I answered, And that...

Music: (brief) - - - - -
Silence.

Opener: ...is that mine too?
But I don't answer anymore.
And they don't say anything anymore.
They have quit.
Good. (pp.45-6)

As the end approaches, the counterpointing of Opener and Voice becomes even clearer, its clarity only confirmed by the Opener's assurance : "No resemblance". He does, however, admit for the first time that it was the voice which "they" said was "in his head"; and his question about Music, "...is that mine too?", is dislocated from its context ("I answered...") and rendered almost rhetorical by the intervening silence (That is mine!). Even they "have quit": the end must be near. Yet the Opener is still "clutching" and clinging on, as the most significant detail of the Woburn-scene indicates, even now there are "no thwarts" to finishing. "I'm afraid to open," he admits. "But I must open./So I open" (p.46).

As Woburn's boat heads tillerless towards "open sea", Opener, losing his detachment, cries "with VOICE", "Come on! Come on!" (p.46). Voice declares that it may be "too far...toolate", for the lights of the land have disappeared: only those "of the sky" remain to furnish the illumination which is necessary if Woburn is to expire : "he need only...turn over...he'd see them...shine on him...but no... he clings on...Woburn...he's changed...nearly enough -". "Nearly enough"; the Opener examines his existence :

There was a time I asked myself, what is it.
There were times I answered, It's the outing.
Two outings.
Then the return.
Where?
To the village.
To the inn.
Two outings, then at last the return, to the
village, to the inn, by the only road that
leads there.
An image, like any other.
But I don't answer anymore.
I open.

(p.47)

Voice and Music continue "as though they had linked their arms" (pp.47-8) and, accompanied by a "fervent" "Good!" from the Opener, strive for their oblivion, teetering on the edge : " - this time...it's the right one...finish...no more stories...sleep...we're there... nearly...just a few more...don't let go...Woburn...he clings on... come on...come on -" (p.48). The play ends as we look down the bottom reaches of an asymptotic curve. Up to the end Voice and Music are still on the brink; like them, the play itself never gives up. Radio I and Radio II (Rough), the two contemporaneous plays on the same theme, were withheld by Beckett. It is not inconceivable that one of his reasons for withholding them was that, unlike Cascando, both of them end in utter hopelessness. Even if Voice and Music will never achieve their goal, they are still able to struggle on, but Radio I ends with the Opener/Animator figure utterly deserted by his Voice and Music (which come from a radio), whispering amidst silence, and Radio II ends feebly with lines that suggest the author too had given up his work. The Animator says to his Stenographer :

Don't cry, miss, dry your pretty eyes and
smile at me. Tomorrow, who knows, we may
be free.

(EAO, p.104)

It might be conjectured that Beckett jettisoned these two plays because their literary failure is also a moral failure: the plays themselves are defeated with their chief characters (Beckett himself is of course the ultimate Opener/Voice). Even Words and Music seems ambiguous in the end; only Cascando promises a way out. (It should be clear that I am using the word "failure" here in a conventional, relativistic sense. In the play's own absolutist terms, success would be the ontological achievement of reaching the oblivion

which is perfect being: whereas the play is only interested in the achievement; we are interested in the achieving.)

Woburn's seems to be the being which, when "fixed", will release both the Opener and Voice. "Woburn...it's him...see him...say him..." (p.48): Voice's penum is to "say" Woburn, to fix him exactly with words. Yet, as the Opener knows, no word is adequate, abstract enough; each one constitutes "an image, like any other". Two puns furnish a metaphor for the Opener's own activity: Voice and Woburn are his "two outings", and they return "to the inn". His description of what he does is, therefore, "an image like any other": "Two outings, then at last the return, to the village, to the inn, by the only road that leads there." Even the most abstract - seeming words are by definition metaphors - they carry their subject across into a realm of pseudo-being, thus creating a mere image - and the greater the effort to "fix" the subject, that is, the more words that are used, the faster the images will proliferate, all of them false. The absence of any other creative materials but words puts the seal on the creative predicament. The work becomes a wilderness of images, the linguistic equivalent of a hall of mirrors, fashioned by voices out of the air.

What then of the subject, whose task is to make himself, to objectify himself? Logically there is none. The predicament itself can only be explained by way of a self-cancelling image. Beckett described it to Lawrence Harvey: "What complicates it all is the need to make. Like a child in mud but no mud. And no child. Only need."¹¹ Thus the author, in propria persona, but this too is "an image like any other". No one of the fragmented inventions (even,

as here, the author's own) is more "real" or "objective" or true than any other: even the voices we hear are put in ontological jeopardy. Thus when the Opener speaks, it is not of himself now but of another time; his whole manner is that of someone standing at one remove from himself : "There was a time I asked myself, what is it./There were times I answered, It's the outing." He is a quoter, and more particularly a self-quoter. "But I don't answer anymore," he declares; but of course he does, though at one remove, just as he creates at one remove, through Voice and Music. Indeed there seems no real self, only the fictional "removes", images like any other: It is thus that the consternation behind the form of Cascando makes itself felt: grasping at stable positions and definite beings for characters, as we naturally do, we become momentarily disconcerted when the Opener-Voice-Woburn relationship seems radically to shift. At first it seems clear that Opener has Voice in his head and that Voice invents Woburn. Yet - and this is where the abstractness of Cascando becomes an expressive advantage - Opener is not so firmly established as a character that we can be assured of his status when Woburn too is said to have "something in his head". Is the Opener really a part of Woburn? Is Woburn's "vague memory" of a shelter also the Opener's vague memory of once being Woburn? Are the Opener and Voice and Music all in Woburn's head? The perspective might be reversed; and the result would be like looking through the wrong end of a telescope. We have to ask: Who is whose fiction? Are they all fiction? The virtually pure abstract radiophony of Cascando precipitates this formal consternation, whereby the character whom we thought to be wholly invented seems in the end to be more "real" than his inventors. As Katharine Worth has observed, "Woburn ends by seeming a character

on his own, more there than the characters who present him, because so sharply visualised."¹² This pinpoints well the tendency to believe that something is somehow "more there" if it is "sharply visualised". And it also suggests why a medium in which there is nothing to be seen is so congenial to a writer who is concerned above all with presence and non-presence.

As befits a shorter play, Cascando is harder, clearer and more schematic than either All That Fall or Embers. It is, I think, by far the most successful of the French radio plays of "circa 1960", for the high degree of abstraction which it maintains enables it to convey more potently than any of Beckett's other plays for the medium the sense of an unstable and continually shifting ontological situation. However it pays for its particular (French?) virtues of clarity and economy with those (Anglo-Irish?) qualities of richness and ambiguity which are so apparent in All That Fall and Embers. It is hard to see where Beckett's radio drama could go after Cascando.

Chapter Eight : PLAY

Written 1962 (fourth typescript dated August 1962) - December 1963;

First performed (in German) 14 June 1963. (In English 7 April 1964)¹

As its name indicates, Play is the ultimate parody of play. Absolute in its stylisation, it confronts us with a situation which is as near total abstraction in the theatre as anything we might be capable of imagining. It is the logical conclusion of the line of development from Waiting for Godot through Endgame and Happy Days. We know that Beckett is apt to talk about the structures of his plays in musical terms; the text of Play is hardly a dramatic text at all - more a musical score. The speech of the three "characters" (if we can call them that)

is provoked by a spotlight projected on faces alone.

The transfer of light from one face to another is immediate. No blackout, i.e. return to almost complete darkness of opening, except when indicated.

The response to light is immediate.

Faces impassive throughout. Voices toneless except where an expression is indicated.

Rapid Tempo throughout.

(p.9)

The piece opens with a trio : "Faint spots simultaneously on three faces. Three seconds. Voices faint, largely unintelligible" (p.9). (In a note Beckett even "scores" this section.) And it "ends" with a da capo instruction: "Repeat play" (p.22). It is all as close to the absolute abstraction of music as seems possible, an apparent non plus ultra.

Yet there is a paradox here, for though Play tends towards total abstraction, its momentum in performance is exhilarating in an almost physical way. The stage picture hints at this.

Front centre, touching one another, three identical grey urns about one yard high. From each a head protrudes, the neck held fast in the urn's mouth. The heads are those, from left to right as seen from auditorium, of W2, M and W1. They face undeviatingly front throughout the play. Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns. But no masks.

This might at first appear an attempt to abstract the players out of existence, but its effect is exactly the opposite, for it ends up brutalising them into existence. They become not just presences, but grotesque parody presences, revealed by the shifting light which torments them. But only revealed then, when they are obliged to speak, so that, for the audience, language in the play is inextricably bound up with the parody presence of the "characters". Thus we feel that it is not only the light (in conjunction with the stage-set) but also the words of the text which produce the effect of parody presence.

"The source of light is single" and "at the centre of the footlights, the faces being thus lit at close quarters and from below"; "a single mobile spot should be used, swivelling at maximum speed from one face to another as required", "expressive of a unique inquisitor" (p.23). What does this inquisitor require? W1 addresses the light :

Is it that I do not tell the truth, is that it, that some day somehow I may tell the truth at last and then no more light at last, for the truth.

"The truth", though she does not seem to know it (and it would perhaps hardly help her to know it), is this play's version of the "sign or set of words" which is the unattainable ontological aim of the Beckett character, the non-existent formulation which would release her into perpetual darkness ("no more light at last"). But neither she nor her companions can hold out even delusive hopes of telling that ontological "truth" (here imaged as the moral "truth" of a human relationship), for they are condemned, in this "ultimate version of the Protestant Hell...to repeat, repeat, versions of what happened elsewhere, long ago, not to their credit".² ("Penitence, yes, at a pinch, atonement, one was resigned, but no, that does not seem to be the point either", p.20). Everything is fixed, toneless, repeated, absolutely cyclic. There is no search for the desiderated "truth", only the frenzied adherence to the same groove of the record. And in any case the inquisitor is apparently not listening, cannot listen: "Mere eye. No mind. Opening and shutting on me" (p.21). The "characters" can produce only parody versions of themselves, for language itself, their only recourse, can yield up nothing better than a sordid parody, in the shape of a story about adultery, of the truth they need.

For the "characters", the words they speak are stone dead, entirely without semantic "charge". The "toneless" delivery at a "rapid tempo" confirms that, as far as they are concerned, words are merely props, aural objects which the light obliges them to utter for some mysterious reason (or unreason) and yielded up unwaveringly in a frenzied attempt to get it off themselves. Communication is never an issue, since each is apparently oblivious to the presence of the others: "they face undeviatingly front throughout the play", never addressing each other directly. It is the same hell, yet

each person is in it alone. For us, however, they are "connected", and in such a way as to vitalise their language. Each of the characters tells his or her version of the same story in parallel with the others, so that a mutually counterpointed narrative is gradually built up. The counterpointing is a matter of verbal detail as well as narrative content. As Alec Reid writes :

...each speech is like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle, almost meaningless of itself but acquiring increased significance when fitted to another to which it, likewise, gives added meaning. The points of connection between one utterance and those around it, either preceding or succeeding it, are easily recognised.³

After the opening chorus and an abortive narrative chorus the three strands are separated and the exposition starts :

W1 : I said to him, Give her up. I swore
by all I held most sacred -

Spot from W1 to W2.

W2 : One morning as I was sitting stitching
by the open window she burst in and
flew at me. Give him up, she screamed,
he's mine. Her photographs were kind
to her. Seeing her now for the first
time full length in the flesh I
understood why he preferred me.

Spot from W2 to M.

M : We were not long together when she
smelled the rat. Give up that whore,
she said, or I'll cut my throat -
(hiccup) pardon - so help me God.
I knew she could have no proof. So I
told her I did not know what she was
talking about.

Spot from M to W2.

W2 : What are you talking about? I said,

stitching away. Someone yours?
Give up whom? I smell you off him,
she screamed, he stinks of bitch.

Spot from W2 to W1.

W1 : Though I had him dogged for months by
a first rate man, no shadow of proof was
forthcoming...

(pp.10-11)

The verbal echo and counterpoint certainly is "easily recognised" :
"So I told her I did not know what she was talking about/What are
you talking about? I said"; "I smell you off him, she screamed,
he stinks of bitch/Though I had him dogged for months..."So too
is the artful narrative counterpointing: for example, W2, by
saying that she was "sitting stitching by the open window" when
the other woman burst in, creates an image of herself as a self-
possessed, cool woman-of-the-world: "What are you talking about?
I said, stitching away;" W1, on the other hand, simply launches
out hysterically, both at the man (in her own speech) and at W2.
Such details are relatively clear. They tend to bring to life for
us momentarily a language which for its speakers is dead. It is
strange to find, however, that the most pervasive and effective
counterpointing in Play, a process which brings the language to
life even more potently and more frequently than do those already
noted, seems to have gone unrecognised. This is the counterpointing
of the characters' present situation with their past as told in the
narratives, or, in the simplest terms, of the stage-picture with
what the words tell us. This, a characteristic example of Beckett's
resourcefulness, is not as new to his drama as it might at first
seem. In Endgame it makes itself felt in droll comic details :

The lid of Nagg's bin lifts. His hands appear,

gripping the rim. Then his head emerges. In his mouth a biscuit. He listens.

Hamm : Did your seeds come up?

Clov : No.

(E, p.13)

A pun on "lid" contributes an even more devious example. As part of his opening business, whilst Hamm is still asleep, Clov goes to the ashbins, "raises one lid, stoops and looks into bin. Brief laugh. He closes lid. Same with other bin"(E,pp. 11-12). What he sees is the "very white face"(E,p.15) of Nagg (and then Nell's). A few moments later Hamm questions him :

Hamm : Did you never have the curiosity, while I was sleeping, to take off my glasses and look into my eyes?

Clov : Pulling back the lids? (Pause.) No...

Hamm : It seems they've gone all white.

(E, p.13)

A poignant detail in Krapp's Last Tape works in a similar way. The taped voice remembers the scene with the girl in the punt : "I bent over her...I lay down across her...We lay there without moving". "Lie down across her" is the phrase, now an imperative, with which Krapp-at-69 turns for the last time to his tape (as against his present state: "Lie propped up in the dark - and wander): "He suddenly bends over machine"(KE,all p.19). The only thing Krapp can lie down across now is his recorder, and that is his position as the play ends, relating to a machine.⁴

This counterpoint of text and stage, which registers as a kind of visual pun, however, not just a matter of ingenious detail; it

is also of central importance to the structure of the Beckett play, or rather it is of increasing structural importance by the time we reach Play. Vladimir and Estragon create an image of their own existential situation in the "dead voices"; Hamm's "chronicle" is nothing more and nothing less than an image of his own creative situation; each of Henry's imaginings, his stories, his interlocutors and his noises, images and attempts to resolve his imaginative predicament. The central figure of the Beckett play creates images of the creative - ontological situation of the self and of the (uncreated) self in creation. Thus what the protagonist creates, his text, counterpoints his predicament as represented in the stage-image. This is the major structural fact of the Beckett play, a fact which becomes more and more obvious with each successive drama. It is in this way that form is always tending towards congruence and identity with content, and vice-versa. "Here form is content, content is form." The full implications of this for Play, the precise nature and purpose of the counterpoint of text and stage, need to be examined at more length.

The stage-picture of Play presents us with images of extreme physical constriction - only mouth and eyes can move - but what we hear about involves the most extravagantly physical gestures imaginable. The language, like the gestures it renders, is that of the melodrama of adultery, a tissue of cliché describing the cliché of the eternal triangle: "...she burst in and flew at me...Seeing her now for the first time full length in the flesh I understood why he preferred me...she smelled a rat...Give up that whore she said, or I'll cut my throat...I smell you off him, she screamed, he

stinks of bitch." In this visual context, a phrase like "I swore by all I held most sacred" takes on a new, comic life. In her urn, W1 can "hold" nothing, sacred or otherwise, just as W2 cannot see her, we cannot see her, "full length in the flesh". Even the detail "I was sitting stitching" is endowed with an eerie resonance when we cannot see W2's hands. (The stitching might stand as an emblem of Beckett's dramatic technique of counterpoint in the whole play: parts weave in and out, piercing each other). And "by the open window"? The only window now is the "mere eye" of the "unique inquisitor" light.

The counterpointing of text and stage-picture starts in the very first thing we hear (or do not hear: it is in the opening chorus) from W2 :

Yes, perhaps, a shade gone, I suppose, some
might say, poor thing, a shade gone, just a
shade, in the head -

(pp.9-10)

"Shade" remains a pun until we reach "in the head": with her "shade gone", she is too much in the light which forces her to speak. From here on the counterpointing comes thick and very fast, setting up a cruel and grotesque comedy :

So I took her in my arms and swore I could
not live without her. I meant it, what is
more. Yes I am sure I did.

(p.11)

Judge then of my astoundment when one fine
morning, as I was sitting stricken in the
morning room, he slunk in, fell on his
knee before me, buried his face in my lap
and...confessed.

(p.11)

The "toneless" delivery of the speakers is occasionally set off ironically against a casual detail in the text :

She put a bloodhound on me, but I had a
little chat with him.

(p.12)

Most cruelly of all, M thinks it would be nice if the three of them were to

Meet, and sit, now in the one dear old
place, now in the other, and sorrow
together, and compare - (hiccup) pardon -
happy memories.

(p.18)

Any cliché to do with physical movement in the text takes on another dimension in the light of this stage-picture :

To what will love not stoop! I suggested a
little jaunt to celebrate, to the Riviera or
our darling Grand Canary. He was looking
pale. Peaked. But this was not possible just
then. Professional commitments.

(p.12)

She came again. Just strolled in. All honey.
Licking her lips. Poor thing. I was doing my
nails, by the open window. He has told me all
about it, she said. Who he, I said filing
away, and what it? I know what torture you must
be going through she said, and I have dropped
in to say I bear you no ill-feeling.

(pp.12-13)

"Dropped in" indeed . The lips come up again later and more obliquely :

Personally I always preferred Lipton's.

(p.18)

"Tons" on the lips hints cruelly at the intense physical effort of speech which is more explicitly registered a few seconds later:

Like dragging a great roller, on a scorching day.
The strain...to get it moving, momentum coming -
...kill it and strain again.

(p.19)

The image is a peculiar one, but not merely random. It relates back to W2's "I could hear a mower. An old hand mower" and, immediately following, M's "Some fool was cutting grass. A little rush, then another" (p.13). The "little rush" obviously mirrors the present situation, but it is perhaps less clear that the mowing and rolling go together as essential preparations for another game played on "scorching days" which necessitates the spectator moving his head to and fro: tennis. Melodramatic romantic clichés are consistently pricked to life:

Then I got frightened and made a clean
breast of it.

When he came again we had it out. I felt
like death.

- but not much stomach for her leavings
either.

(All p.13)

Repulsive physical detail registers strangely in this context :

Pudding face, puffy, spots, blubber mouth,
jowls, no neck, dugs you could - ...Calves
like a flunkey - (p.13).

The past situation sometimes suggests the present:

In the meantime we were to carry on as before.
By that he meant as best we could.

All grey with frozen dew.

(Both p.14)

And poignantly :

I made a bundle of his things and burnt them.
It was November and the bonfire was going. All
night I smelt them smouldering.

(p.15)

With cruel irony:

Perhaps she has taken him away to live...

somewhere in the sun.

(p.19)

Punningly :

A little dinghy, on the river, I resting on
my oars, they lolling on air - pillows in the
stern...sheets. Drifting. Such fantasies.

(p.21, my emphases.)

In an apparent eternity of togetherness, a simple remark takes
on a piercing irony :

To think we were never together. (p.20)

And perhaps the most stunning double-application of all, which
comes at the very end of the play, indicating yet another repeat
(they are also M's first words in the play); we realise that
only the curtain prevents us from going through it again and
again, and we hear :

We were not long together - (p.22).

The "we" refers to the three of them, but now it has also come
to include us, the audience. Certainly, the play was not "long"
(twenty minutes or so?) for us, compared to the three for whom
it might go on indefinitely behind the curtain.

The counterpoint of Play does not function merely by the
accumulation of revived linguistic detail. The work's
narrative structure finds an important echo in its dramatic
mechanism. The comédie-style story which is pieced together by
the three figures is one of sordid suburban adultery. It begins
with the confrontation by the wife (W1) of the other woman (W2),

continues with the man's attempt to return to the bond of marriage ("So I took her in my arms and swore I could not live without her. I meant it, what is more. Yes, I am sure I did.") and ends, indeterminately, with the relapse into adultery ("Then I began to smell her off him again", p.14). There is a hint, though only a hint, that the man committed suicide: "Finally it was all too much. I simply could no longer - " (p.14). A story which focusses on the external triangle will also focus in some way on truth-telling, thus it is cruelly apt that what the light seems to be after is some kind of truth: "Is it that I do not tell the truth, is that it, that some day somehow I may tell the truth at last and then no more light at last, for the truth?" But the truth the "unique inquisitor" wants is ontological, not moral.

A less obvious but ultimately more important structural detail of counterpoint between text and stage-picture is the recurrent dualism of coming/going, with the related in/out :

...she burst in and flew at me. (p.10)

...if he is still living, and has not forgotten, coming and going on the earth, letting people in, showing people out,...

...he slunk in... (Both p.11)

I can't have her crashing in here, she said...

She came in. Just strolled in. (Both p.12)

...and I have dropped in to say I bear you no ill-feeling.

That meant he had gone back to her. Back to that!

(Both p.13)

...you're well out of that.

When he stopped coming I was prepared. (Both p.14)

If the adultery story is plainly one of comings and goings, ins and outs, so too is the stage-"story" :

When you go out - and I go out. Some day you will
tire of me and go out...for good...Give me up,
as a bad job. Go away and start poking and pecking
at someone else.

(p.16)

This is W2, the mistress, addressing the light as if it were a lover, someone who would "tire" of her and "go out", just as M had gone out so frequently. The significant point about M is that he comes and goes "on the earth, letting people in, showing people out": in fact he does exactly the same thing as the light. There is something insidiously sexual about the "poking and pecking" of this "inquisitor". It is a lucent incubus :

Weary of playing with me. Get off me.

(p.21)

Given the title of the work, "playing" takes on a peculiar force. In driving his drama to what seems to be a non plus ultra of abstraction, Beckett in fact mobilises the most grossly physical of resonances. The dramatic "playing" is simultaneously a repulsive sexual "playing". The choice for the text - which at first appears so unimportant except as an arsenal of abstract verbal ammunition - of a story about sex is hardly accidental. Indeed the foundation of Play is made manifest by the general counterpointing of a narrative about sex with a dramatic mechanism which makes

itself felt as insinuatingly sexual in nature. As in Happy Days, the sketch Radio II (Rough for Radio), and, more distantly, Embers, sexual creativity is seen as an image of "artistic" creativity.

And since for Beckett existence is creativity and the will to create the will to "live", that will, abstracted and impersonalised though it is in the shape of the inquisitor - light, is seen as essentially sexual.

But of course, that sexual creativity is only "an image, like any other" of the "artistic" creativity undertaken by the "characters" in the urns is something which Play everywhere insists upon. I have spoken throughout, in a conventional way, of the techniques and tricks by which the language of the play is "brought to life". And yet in what does this revitalisation consist? Metaphors are repeatedly woken up, as it were; clichés animated: "a clean breast", "not much stomach" and so on. But what is made inescapable is that these expressions are only metaphors, that at best language can only manage an image of the real creation the half-created "characters" demand of it - or are obliged to demand. Words yield only parody representations of things : the melodramatic narrative we are given parodies any notion we might have of true artistic creativity just as the functioning of the light furnishes a horrible parody of sexual creativity - not really creating anything. "What happened elsewhere, long ago, not to their credit". But did it happen? If the narrative of adultery is essentially an extended metaphor for the creative process which the characters are obliged by the light to undertake, how can any of it be said to have "happened"? The reality would be the desiderated ontological "truth". As it is, words always leave these suffering parody presences at one

remove, yet words are all there is. Play is the ultimate image of the terrible creative obligation Beckett spoke of to Duthuit. The later plays haunt the same territory, but they throw up nothing quite so dark as this.

Chapter Nine : LATER PLAYS.

Not I : written 20 March - 1 April 1972¹; first performed
16 January 1973.

That Time : written June 1974 - August 1975; first performed
20 May 1976.

Footfalls : written March - November 1975; first performed
20 May 1976.

Between 1963 and 1972 Beckett wrote little and costively. In complete contrast to the creative explosion (or perhaps implosion would be a better word for this writer) of the period from 1956 to 1963, the next nine years were virtually barren. There were the short prose pieces the author himself calls residua: Imagination Dead, Imagine, Enough, Ping, The Lost Ones, Lessness, and Still (all, except Still, written in French and most of them abandoned fragments of projected longer works); and there were three plays: the "dramaticule" Come and Go (1965), the television play Eh Joe (1966) and the near-joke Breath (1970) - all of them neatly finished but (perhaps because of that) none of them estimable; plus Film (1964). It seemed as though, after years of apparent effort, Beckett had written himself out at last: more than one critic saw in Breath, which lasts for about 35 seconds and represents rubbish-laden life as consisting of a single breath ("inspiration" and "expiration") bounded by the vagitus and the death-cry, the non plus ultra and the final expiration of Beckett's dramatic art.

But for Beckett : simply to stop writing would have been too easy -

just as Breath itself is too easy - for it would have meant playing false by the creative necessity ("only need"), the obligation which has always been the dynamic centre of both his art and his life. Art for Beckett has never been a matter of choice, still less a luxury that can be refrained from. It is not surprising, therefore, that his first major play after the nine year barren period of the 'sixties and early 'seventies should be a piece which seems to vent, with a visceral ferocity even he had never achieved before, the force of that creative necessity which had been pent for all of nine years. The urgency of Not I (1973) is, indeed, the urgency of a solution to a creative problem, the problem which had "blocked" Beckett and prevented him from writing anything of weight and substance for the theatre since Play.

Beckett's dramatic development up to 1963 consists in an increasingly intense and grotesque series of attempts, culminating in the anonymity and savage abstraction of Play, to realise ontological absence on the stage by way of a dramatic self-consciousness which produces the parody presence of "provisional beings". Both the stage-picture (including the appearances of the characters themselves) and the linguistic structure of the play are parodied so as to achieve an effect of "existence by proxy" or être manqué. The pervasive parody was at first so delicate that in Waiting for Godot, as we have seen, its extent is rarely realised and as a result the play is often only half-understood. But with each successive play the ferocity of the visual and linguistic stylisation becomes more and more apparent until we are left, in Play, with something that can only be understood in terms of parody. Play is what the Beckett play always was, parody of what we understand to be a "play".

Just as the "characters" are at a remove from their real selves, their real characters, so the Beckett play is at a remove from what we conventionally take to be a "play". Everything here is secondhand, parody. The Brechtian verfremdungseffekt has been enlisted for ontological purposes.

Parody is for Beckett, as for Mann's Adrian Leverkühn, a terminal strategy. Language cannot fulfil its ontological obligation, but where there is no other creative resource, the artist must have recourse to parody, parody not of this or that mode or style but, as Donald Davie observes, of the medium itself. "Que voulez-vous, Monsieur? C'est les mots; on n'a rien d'autre"? Pound reminds us that "the medium of drama is not words but persons moving about on a stage using^{words}", yet, as we have seen, the defunctive machines which we call bodies are for the Cartesian Beckett scant consolation, and certainly not salvation!

How then does Not I effect a solution? Of course, if a solution is thought of as a breakthrough, it cannot. Its medium is still drama. But this play relates very interestingly to Pound's definition, for here we have something "moving about on a stage using words", but it is not a "person", even though it bears an important relation to the "person" who is on stage. "On one occasion", records Lawrence Harvey, "Beckett said 'I write because I have to', and added, 'What do you do when 'I can't' meets 'I must'? He admitted to using words where words are illegitimate. "At that level you break up words to diminish shame"³ (my emphasis). Not I breaks up "to diminish shame" not just words but the human body. The dissociation from self ("existence by proxy") which is Beckett's subject is here imaged

in the dissociation and displacement of the organ of speech from the body. Play had done grotesque things to the body ("the neck held fast in the urn's mouth"), as had Happy Days before it, but neither play had gone to the lengths of splitting off the dominant organ from the rest of the body. The result is the most grotesque of all the parody presences in Beckett's theatre:

Stage in darkness but for MOUTH, upstage audience right, about 8 feet above stage level, faintly lit from close-up and below, rest of face in shadow. Invisible microphone.

AUDITOR, downstage audience left, tall standing figure, sex undeterminable, enveloped from head to foot in loose black djellaba, with hood, fully faintly lit, standing on invisible podium about 4 feet high, shown by attitude alone to be facing diagonally across stage intent on MOUTH, dead still throughout but for four brief movements where indicated.

(p.13)

Just as the physicist splits the atom in order to generate the energy he needs, so Beckett splits the "in-dividual" body-machine in order to generate the necessary dramatic energy. And as the play's title indicates, the stage-picture's dissociation and displacement of the mouth from its body finds its linguistic counterpoint in Mouth's "vehement refusal to relinquish third person" in her narrative, a story which concerns her "self" in some way. (At this stage we can be no more precise than that.)

The connection between Mouth and the Auditor cannot be explained simply in terms of the Cartesian split. Beckett notes that the Auditor's "brief movement"

consists in simple sideways raising of arms from sides and their falling back, in a

gesture of helpless compassion. It lessens with each recurrence till scarcely perceptible at third. There is just enough pause to contain it as MOUTH recovers from vehement refusal to relinquish third person.

(p.12)

This "gesture of helpless compassion" is the only perceptible link between Mouth and the Auditor, but it soon becomes apparent that a more eerily intimate and - for Mouth - troublesome connection exists. In Cascando it seemed at some points as though the Opener had a silent interlocutor :

Good.

Pause.

Yes, correct, the month of May.

You know, the reawakening.

Pause.

I open.

(P2R, p.45)

"You know"? From the very beginning of Not I we are conscious of the presence, somewhere, of a "you" who knows what Mouth vehemently refuses to admit :

MOUTH: ...out...into this world...this world...
tiny little thing...before its time...
in a godfor--...what?...girl?...yes...
tiny little girl...

(p.13)

What starts out as a series of frustrating quibbles which retard the stream of words ("whether standing...or sitting...but the brain-- ...what?...kneeling?...yes...whether standing...or sitting...or kneeling...but the brain--...what?...lying?...yes..." p.14) mounts to an unrelenting confrontation of Mouth's "...lying?...yes?...":

...God is love...tender mercies...new every morning...back in the fields...April morning... face in the grass...nothing but the larks... pick it up there...get on with it from there... another few — ...what?...not that?...nothing to do with that?...nothing she could tell?...all right...nothing she could tell...try something else...think of something else...oh long after... sudden flash...not that either...all right... something else again...so on...hit on it in the end...think everything keep on long enough... then forgiven...back in the—...what?...not that either?...nothing to do with that either?... nothing she could think?...all right...nothing she could tell...nothing she could think... nothing she—...what?...who?...no!...she!... (pause and movement 4)...

(p.19)

Who or what is the source of this terrible authenticity which eats its way back into each of Mouth's fictional vehicles until it comes to the ultimate "vice-exister", "she" herself? It is someone or something which is privy not only to what Mouth "tells" but also to what she "thinks": "nothing she could tell...nothing she could think...nothing she—...what?" "It is clear," writes Hersh Zeifman, "that the Mouth's monologue is subject to some kind of corrective process, internal or external, and it seems to me that the Auditor comes to represent, for the audience, the visual symbol of that corrective process — the attempt to make the Mouth admit the truth about herself — as well as being a witness to its failure".⁴ This seems to me needlessly circuitous (as well as tautologous): we need only conceive of Mouth as being split off from the Auditor to make sense of the silent interlocutor in the play's text. Thus the displacement manifest in the stage-picture is rendered significant and complex by the subtleties of the words. The split between Mouth and Auditor both is and is not a split, for though we see that the Auditor is physically separate from Mouth,

the text indicates that a vestigial mental unity still obtains. It is sensed by Mouth - via her vice-exister of course - as "something begging in the brain...begging the mouth to stop..." (p.17), "all the time something begging...something in her begging...begging it all to stop...unanswered. (p20) This is the verbal equivalent of the "gesture of helpless compassion" with which the Auditor punctuates Mouth's outpourings.

Mouth's words circle warily around the crucial moment of the split in "her", the April morning when, "coming up to seventy" and "wandering in a field...looking aimlessly for cowslips...to make a ball", "she...found herself in the dark" with a persistent buzzing in her ears and a "ray of light" which "came and went...such as the moon might cast...drifting...in and out of cloud" (pp.13-14). Like the Opener's "outings" in "May" ("You know, the reawakening"), it is an attempt to make something real by creating a sharp visual image of it: "a few steps then stop...stare into space...then on...a few more...stop and stare again...so on...drifting around..." (p.14). Yet the fleshing out of concrete detail always brings Mouth back to herself: "whether standing...or sitting...or kneeling...or lying..." Even "her" "drifting around" is an apt description of Mouth herself. "Suddenly, says Mouth, "she realised...words were coming...imagine!...words were coming...a voice she did not recognise...at first...so long since it had sounded...then finally had to admit...could be none other...than her own...certain vowel sounds...she had never heard...elsewhere..." (p.16). The exclamation "imagine!" underlines Mouth's own delusion by suggesting a distance which does not exist; Mouth does not have to imagine: "...and now this stream...not catching the half of it...not the quarter...no idea...what she

was saying...imagine!...no idea what she was saying!...till she began trying to delude herself...it was not hers at all...not her voice at all..." (p.16).

"Her" attempts at self-delusion, according to Mouth, are thwarted by the seeming return of feeling and sensation. The "machine", which at first seemed "so dis-connected" and "powerless to respond... like numbed" (p.15), seems now to be "coming back", or at least "the mouth alone" :

...till she began trying to...delude herself...
it was not hers at all...not her voice at all...
and no doubt would have...vital she should...
was on the point...after long efforts...when
suddenly she felt...gradually she felt...her
lips moving...imagine!...her lips moving!...as
of course till then she had not...and not alone
the lips...the cheeks...the jaws...the whole face...
all those —...what?...the tongue?...yes...the
tongue in the mouth...all those contortions
without which...no speech possible...

(pp. 16-17)

It might be going too far to say that Not I is a play with dismemberment at its centre; nevertheless rememberment is one of its chief concerns, that is, the reintegration of the self ('I') to be effected by the mobilisation of "the machine". The text always insists on physical detail. This is something we feel at the very outset:

...out...into this world...this world...
tiny little thing...before its time...
in a godfor—...what?...girl?...yes...
tiny little girl...into this...out into
this...before her time...godforsaken hole
called...

(p.13)

The fragmented, elliptical syntax creates a tissue of suggestion and innuendo. The mode of progression, too, is important, for it shows clearly the Auditor's promptings and questionings at work within the text. The progression is something like this:

"...out". What is out? The mouth of the body? No: "...into this world...this world". What is this world? The mouth itself?

"...tiny little thing". Again, this is surely the mouth, for it too is "before its time". But this time the self-correction is explicit: "...what?...girl?...yes...tiny little girl..." And again, what is the "godforsaken hole called"? The counterpointing continues throughout the play: the stage-picture is so extraordinary that it tends to draw every physical detail to itself, so that in the end the mouth is almost the sole visual referent of the text. And not only a referent in itself: its state too becomes a referent, and at several points the text effects weird disembodiments and embodiments. There is "her" "hand in the list" at the "supermart": for a moment "hand" seems to register as a noun and not a verb shorn of its pronoun. The elliptical style creates momentarily surreal effects before recovering itself: "...middle of the throng...motionless...staring into space...mouth half open as usual...till it was back in her hand". Her mouth "back in her hand"? No: "the bag back in her hand...then pay and go..." (p.16). The mouth is displaced again: "...mouth on fire...stream of words ...in her ear...practically in her ear..." (p.17). For a split-second the mouth itself seems to be "in her ear". The hand too is subject to this momentary double-focus effect: "...old hag already...sitting staring at her hand...where was it?..." Where indeed; an important part of the machine must have detached itself. The answer? "Croker's Acres". Of course! "...one evening on the way home...home!...a little mound in Croker's Acres...dusk...sitting

staring at her hand...there in her lap..." (p.18). The last phrase not only tells us where her hand was but also, by its very presence, confirms the validity of our initial puzzlement. At another point, "she", "waiting to be led away" from the courtroom, is "glad of the hand on her arm". Whose hand? Her own? Her guard's? The text not only refers to the body as a machine; it also creates, by way of evanescent syntactical effects, an image — if an eerily incomplete one — of the body as machine. Thus there is inherent in the words Mouth uses a pull towards that rememberment and re-integration she so dreads.

In the observation I quoted earlier Hersch Zeifman speaks of the Auditor's "attempt to make the Mouth admit the truth about herself". This implies that Not I is above all a moral play — that there is a "truth" as well as Mouth's coerced untruths. Mouth herself seems to support this notion by conceiving of her present state as a divine punishment for "sins" :

...for her first thought was...oh long
after...sudden flash...brought up as she
had been to believe...with the other waifs...
in a merciful...(brief laugh)...God...(good
laugh)...first thought was...oh long after...
sudden flash...she was being punished...for
her sins...a number of which then...further
proof if proof were needed...flashed through
her mind...

(p.14)

At first "she" "dismissed as foolish" this thought, but then she began to wonder if it "was perhaps not so foolish...after all..." At one point Mouth embodies it in one of her fictional fragments, introducing the scene with an allusion to the only sin which really

matters (since it is antecedent to all the rest): being born.

"She" is "in the toils of that obscure assize where to be is to be guilty"⁵:

...then thinking...oh long after...sudden
flash...perhaps something she had to...had
to...tell...could that be it?...something
she had to...tell...tiny little thing...
before its time...godforsaken hole...no love...
spared that...speechless all her days...
practically speechless...how she survived!...
that time in court...what had she to say for
herself...guilty or not guilty...stand up
woman...speak up woman...stood there staring
into space...mouth half open as usual...
waiting to be led away...glad of the hand on her
arm...now this...something she had to tell...
could that be it?...something that would tell...
how it was...how she —...what?...had been?...
yes...something that would tell how it had been...
how she had lived...lived on and on...guilty or
not...on and on...to be sixty...something she—...
what?...seventy?...good God!...on and on to be
seventy...something she didn't know herself...
wouldn't know if she heard...then forgiven...
God is love...tender mercies...new every morning...

(pp. 18-19)

According to Mouth, in order to be "forgiven" by God "she had to tell". something about "how it had been...how she had lived", "something she didn't know herself...wouldn't know if she heard". Mouth's pensum is the same as Voice's in Cascando and Fox's in Radio II : logically (literally, with words) it is impossible, or seemingly so, and therefore the "truth" that will release Mouth means far more than merely relinquishing the third person and admitting the first. Even if "I" were substituted at every point for "she", Mouth would be no nearer the "truth" she requires in order to achieve integration in the oblivion of true being. Substituting "I" would mean a change merely in the degree of "untruth", a relative alteration

and not the absolute transformation which is needed, for it would only amount to substituting one word, "an image, like any other", for another. Mouth cannot achieve the impossible whilst she remains, as she must since words are all she has, in the field of the possible: "...wandering in a field...looking aimlessly for cowslips...to make a ball..." (p.13).

Nevertheless, Zeifman's suggestion is not wrong: Not I is clearly a play with a moral as well as an ontological charge. Indeed its very title implies a moral situation. The introduction of the notion of self-delusion underlines the point: "...till she began trying to... delude herself...it was not hers at all...not her voice at all... and no doubt would have...vital she should..." Mouth's situation is the same as Henry's in Embers. Both characters produce inventions which they are attempting to objectify and make other than themselves and real (Henry makes Ada and Mouth makes "she"her voice"), but which then turn back on the creators and confront them with the truth: "The time will come when no one will speak to you at all, even complete strangers. (Pause.) You will be quite alone with your voice, there will be no other voice in the world but yours." The vicious circle of fictions is closed: the created turns about and proclaims itself a figment of the creator. The self-deluding "she" is a mirror-image of the self-deluding Mouth, created out of obligation but containing the truth of "her" own creation. It is indeed for Mouth vital she should delude herself (as it was for Henry) that the voice is not hers, because for her to admit "I" would be for her to disclaim and abandon her fictions, for her to become nothing. What her own moral stance implies is that she should admit "I" and thus abandon her fictions. Then she would no longer be obscurely but surely guilty in the assizes which she invents

in one of those very fictions.

Yet she does continue to invent, to delude herself. She needs to believe that her vocal rage is undiminished and perpetually self-renewing, so she invents a moment of "reawakening" on an April morning, a rebirth of "personal" power in Spring (just as the Opener in Cascando has his "outings" in the month of May/you know, the reawakening"); she needs to believe she has plenty of materials to invent with, so she invents a visit to a "busy shopping centre... supermart", together with list and bag (like Winnie and her invaluable properties in Happy Days) and comes away stocked up; most important of all, she needs to believe that her existence, if it can be called that, has some purpose, so she invents a religious context whereby her outpourings are punishment for sins committed and her search a pensum demanded by the tender mercies of a God who "is love" (in this she resembles the tramps in Godot: "If we dropped him?" "He'd punish us..." "And if he comes?" "We'll be saved", WFG, pp.93-94). We have no way of telling whether or not the moment of the splitting-off of the mouth from body, the hinge about which the whole play revolves, is itself a fiction invented to account for the present stage and to enable Mouth to talk all the better. It is thus that a consternation behind the linguistic structure of the play manifests itself.

In her own terms, Mouth is a success; there is no fifth movement from the Auditor and the curtain goes down as she goes on, seemingly stronger than ever :

...all that...keep on...not knowing what...
what she was -- what?...who?...no!...she!...
SHE!...(pause)...what she was trying...what
to try...no matter...keep on...(curtain starts
down)...hit on it in the end...then back...

God is love...tender mercies...new every morning...
back in the field...April morning...face in the
grass...nothing but the larks...pick it up —

(Curtain fully down. House dark. Voice continues
behind curtain, unintelligible, 10 seconds, ceases
as house lights up.)

(p.20)

The Animator in Radio II thinks near the end that Fox may "have something at last" (p.103); Voice in Cascando thinks that "this time... it's the right one...we're there...nearly" (P2R, p.48); words and music seem to have achieved something in Words and Music; Footfalls and That Time, as we shall see, are plays with endings: but Not I ends with Mouth "picking up" her beginning ready to revolve it yet again, like a cracked gramophone record. Or rather, it does not "end" at all in a conventional sense: the "stream of words" is cyclic and might go on indefinitely. The "end" of the play as it stands suggests this : "Voice continues behind curtain" and "ceases" when it must for practical purposes — "as house lights up". We might believe that behind the curtain it goes on ad infinitum, for Mouth seems to be gaining in strength and velocity and the Auditor is finally rendered ineffectual. Not I is perhaps the most hopeless of all Beckett's plays. The situation, as in Embers, is one of existence versus being; "Somethingness" — call it existence by proxy, as Beckett himself has done — versus Nothingness. Mouth, wants Being, but she does not want Nothingness. This is the dynamic upon which Not I is built: a simultaneous desire for and revulsion against being. Woburn in Cascando is made to "cling on" to the last, despite the yearning for release. And though Mouth also seeks release, she still "picks it up" and goes with "it" along the way that will never allow her to "hit on it in the end".

The verbal cascade of Not I ("dull roar like falls", p.18) ended a ten-year drought in Beckett's drama, and such is the peculiar intensity of the play that we might easily guess that fact if we did not know it. It is as though a vast reservoir of pent-up energy had been suddenly vented, overwhelming and distorting everything in its path, including the human body: ten years frustrated creative energy in twenty minutes of stage-performance. And judging from the composition-notebook for the play (now in Reading University Library), Beckett's own creative heat and velocity must have matched those of the mouth we see in front of us. He is a scrupulous, painstaking and therefore generally slow worker: "there were several typescript versions between the manuscript and the first edition"⁶ of En attendant Godot; Fin de Partie required ten months' work (between December 1955 and October 1956); although "Krapp's Last Tape was written in a spurt;⁷ it went through several holograph and typescript stages; Happy Days went through seven drafts⁸ and Play through nine.⁹ But the Not I notebook is marked: "Begun 20.3.72; Finished 1.4.72; Addenda 21.4.72;¹⁰ that is, ten days plus corrections. It is wholly appropriate that the effect of such an explosive performance should be above all visceral. "I am not unduly concerned with intelligibility", Beckett wrote to the actress Jessica Tandy, who gave the first American performances. "I hope the piece may work on the nerves of the audience, not on its intellect."¹¹

The stage-picture of Beckett's next play, That Time (1976), which was published and performed (in that order) three years after Not I, likewise constitutes a strange but potent image of dissociation. However, its mood and tempo, and consequently its effect, are very different. And its dramatic function is exactly the opposite. An old

head is suspended, as if floating, luminous in the darkness 10 feet above stage level, its long white hair "flaring" as though spread out on water, and "as if seen from above". The head is not a talker, as Mouth is, but a "Listener". It listens to three voices which are, according to the author, those of youth, middle-age and old age :¹²

Voices A B C are his own coming to him from both sides and above. They modulate back and forth without any break in general flow except where silence indicated.

(p.23)

A note is appended :

Moments of one and the same voice A B C relay one another without solution of continuity — apart from the two 10-second breaks. Yet the switch from one to another must be clearly faintly perceptible. If threefold source and context prove insufficient to produce this effect it should be assisted mechanically (e.g. threefold pitch).

(p.22)

Words like "modulate" and "pitch" point to the essentially musical nature of the linguistic structure. As in Play (with its da capo structure the most "musical" of Beckett's plays) three voices, each one isolated from the others, progress in parallel (parallel thirds?), all the while building up a complex tissue of narrative counterpoint. But whereas in the earlier play the counterpointing consists of the interweaving of three separate points-of-view which find a common focus in the sordid comédie-plot, the counterpoint in That Time is of apparently independent images, themes and symbolic situations : the voices obliquely mirror each other and their

putative creator (the Listener) rather than weave into one common narrative strand. As always, they present images of the creative predicament, which here, as in Krapp's Last Tape, is specifically concerned with the dissociation of identity created by the flux of time. Three inventions surround the Listener's existence-by-proxy, his provisional being, constituting his search for true being, "that time".

The first of the voices, that of middle-age, speaks (in unpunctuated phrases — the details of phrasing were presumably left to the experienced Beckett interpreter Patrick Magee, for whom the play was written) of a quest :

Silence 7 seconds. LISTENER'S EYES are open.
His breath audible, slow and regular.

A: that time you went back that last time to look
was the ruin still there where you hid as a
child when was that (eyes close) grey. day took
the eleven to the end of the line and on from
there no no trams then all gone long ago that time
you went back to look was the ruin still there
where you hid as a child that last time not a tram
left in the place only the old rails when was that.

(p.23)

The quest doomed to failure is the first fictive (or semi-fictive) image of the Listener's own predicament. He is using this voice in an attempt to "fix" his past — first his childhood and then the "last time" he went back to look if "the ruin was still there" — and to search out a continuity of identity in the face of time's flux. As always with Beckett, the text counterpoints the stage-image: "to look" comes whilst the Listener's eyes are still open, but as they close we hear "grey day". These details underline the

basic mirror-image of voice A: not only does the voice tell of a quest; the voice is itself a quest on the part of the Listener.

The quest in A is a search for a childhood shelter, the ruin. Voice C (old age), which is, rather than B, the next voice, recounts the achievement of shelter :

When you went in out of the rain always
winter then always raining that time in the
Portrait Gallery in off the street out of the
cold and rain slipped in when no one was
looking and through the rooms shivering and
dripping till you found a seat marble slab
and sat down to rest and dry off and on to
hell out of there when was that.

(p.23)

Again, the voice which speaks of shelter is itself a shelter (as in Endgame). As we look at the closed eyes of the Listener we hear that he once "slipped in when no one was looking" to a place — "the Portrait Gallery" — which not only serves lookers but contains pictures of people looking. An intricate gallery of mirror-image images is being built-up, all in the service of the attempt that the Listener is making to find a real, full "portrait" of himself, a self.

Just as the voices "relay one another without solution of continuity", modulating "back and forth without any break in general flow", the separate images tend to melt into each other via the syntax :
(A) when was that...(C) when you went in..." And the detail of the "seat marble slab" in C is taken up by B (youth) and suitably transformed in the third major image, the idyllic stasis :

on the stone together in the sun on the stone

at the edge of the little wood and as far
as eye could see the wheat turning yellow
vowing every now and then you loved each
other just a murmur not touching or anything
of that nature you one end of the stone she
the other long low stone like millstone no
looks just there together on the stone in the
sun with the little wood behind gazing at the
wheat or eyes closed all still no sign of life
not a soul abroad no sound.

(pp. 23-4)

As a love-scene ("you loved each other") this is strangely unreal. If there is "no sign of life" in the landscape nor is there in the two figures. They are "not touching or anything of that nature" but nor is there "a soul abroad" : the ecstasy is hardly even platonic (as Donne's, which this scene resembles, was). The scene seems to represent a yearned-for stability, a still point amidst the revolving "lifelong mess", with promise (in "the wheat turning yellow") of teeming creativity. Yet stability cannot coexist with "life", with "nature" : the only stasis is non-existence. This "love-scene" contains the murmur ("just a murmur not touching") of the voices which are about him and details concerning the eyes, which in his present state are his only means of expression — if the closing and opening of them can be called that: "...as far as eye could see...gazing at the wheat or eyes closed". (And there is an additional suggestive detail in the "long low stone like millstone").

When voice A comes back it takes up the concern with looking :

straight off the ferry and up with the nightbag
to the high street neither right nor left not a
curse for the old scenes...

(p.24)

He "went back that last time to look" (though we are not told immediately what he went to look at), but only at the ruin. His vision "then" was just as fixed ("neither right nor left") as it is now that "he" is only a head which opens its eyes momentarily. In fact it is the act of looking which is important in That Time, rather than the chance of seeing, and it is the image of the looker — whether he be quester (A), gazer (B) or refugee amongst the "looking" pictures of the Portrait Gallery — which is shared by the three voices and which refers them all back to the head of the Listener. The images of looking in the play seem to emerge from a single, simple pun. "As far as eye could see," says B, where the exclusion of the definite article makes this sound like "as far as I could see". As so often in Beckett the promise of creativity and real being seems to locate itself in the eyes; the pun with "I" has always been a possibility — sometimes a probability: Film, which is about being, perception and self-perception, and which opens and closes with an eye filling the screen (it is based on the Berkleian Esse est percipi), was originally called The Eye. Indeed voice C in That Time creates a scene which is reminiscent of Film :

till you hoisted your head and there before
your eyes when they opened a vast oil black
with age and dirt someone famous in his time
some famous man or woman or even child such
as a young prince or princess some young prince
or princess of the blood black with age behind
the glass where gradually as you peered trying to
make it out gradually of all things a face
appeared had you swivel on the slab to see who
it was was there at your elbow.

(pp.24-5)

This is the shock of self-perception. The face which appears is not

in the portrait (with its "important" subject) but on it, a reflection in the glass. Yet such is his lack of a sense of his own existence that he "swivels" on the slab, immediately assuming that the face he sees must be someone else's. Voice C goes on to recount his ontological experiments in a relatively explicit fashion :

when you started not knowing who you were from
Adam trying how that would work for a change not
knowing who you were from Adam no notion who it
was saying what you were saying whose skull you
were clapped up in whose moan had you the way
you were was that the time or was that another
time there alone with the portraits of the dead
black with dirt and antiquity...the rain and the
old rounds trying making it up that way as you
went along how it would work that way for a change
never having been how never having been would work
the old rounds trying to wangle you into it
tottering and muttering all over the parish till
the words dried up and the head dried up and the
legs dried up whoever they were or it gave up
whoever it was.

(pp. 26-7)

The three voices are themselves all ontological "tries" "for a change", just like the "try" at "not knowing who you were" and the "try" at "never having been". They too are "old rounds" — quite literally, since "voices A B C are his own coming to him from both sides and above" — attempting to get back into the skull ("whose skull you were clapped up in") of their proper self. It is this chronic alienation from self which breeds images and multiplies variety in a wilderness of mirrors :

A : or talking to yourself who else out loud
imaginary conversations there was childhood
for you then or eleven on a stone among the
giant nettles making it up now one voice now
another till you were hoarse and they all
sounded the same well on into the night some
moods in the black dark or moonlight and they
all out on the roads looking for you.

(p.25)

The purpose of the Listener's and child's "making it up now one voice now another" is explicitly stated :

B : or by the window in the dark harking to the owl not a thought in your head till hard to believe harder and harder to believe you ever told anyone you loved them or anyone you till just one of those things you kept making up to keep the void out just another of those old tales to keep the void from pouring in on top of you the shroud.

(Silence 10 seconds. Breath audible. After 3 seconds eyes open.)

C : never the same but the same as what for God's sake did you ever say I to yourself in your life come on now (eyes close) could you ever say I to yourself in your life...

(p.25)

The head is hard-pressed — even the owl says "Who?" It is another "Not I" situation, though here the pronoun is "you" not "she". In addition the second-person-singular pronoun — as well as being indistinguishable from its plural (the plurality of fictions?) — is particularly ^cconducive to an intimate, hostile tone, the tone of "come on now..." The head's fictions seem to be under attack at this moment: their purpose and nature are laid bare. The Listener's eyes open, as if to admit the desired illumination, but when voice C accuses him of never saying "I" the "eyes close" and we are ^{prevented} ~~permitted~~ from seeing eyes. (The pivotal pun is half-visual.) For the Listener to have his voices "say I" would be for him to accept the shroud-like void "pouring in on top" of him. And of course the forces which exert pressure on him to do so are not external; they are the voices themselves, the encapsulators of both the urge to invent "vice-existers" and the desire to abandon them. As always in Beckett's best writing, creativity turns back

upon itself in disgust.

As the play progresses the voices provide symbolic commentaries on each other. When the quest-narrative-voice A reaches a powerful image of disconnection and failure the idyllic pastoral stasis of voice B begins to blur and vanish, "no better than shades no worse if it wasn't for the vows" (p.26).

A : no getting out to it that way so what next
no question of asking not another word to
the living as long as you lived so foot it
up in the end to the station bowed half
double get out to it that way all closed
down and boarded up Doric terminus of the
Great Southern and Eastern all closed down
and the colonnade crumbling away so what
next...

B : stock still side by side in the sun then sink
and vanish without Your having stirred any
more than the two knobs on a dumbbell except
the lids and every now and then the lips to
vow and all around too all still all sides
wherever it might be no stir or sound only
faintly the leaves in the little wood behind
or the ears or the bent or the reeds as the
case might be of man no sight of man or
beast no sight or sound.

(p.27)

The unreality and absurdity ("two knobs on a dumbbell") in B reflect on and are reflected on by the non plus ultra and failure ("crumbling away") in A. Images of failure gradually give way to images of resignation and different images begin to merge with each other. The man invented by voice C has an "old green holeproof coat your father left you": this coat reappears immediately after in voice A; and then A introduces the stone we associate with B and C ("seat marble slab") :

A : huddled on the doorstep in the old green

greatcoat in the pale sun with the nightbag
needless on your knees not knowing where you
were little by little not knowing where you
were or when you were or what for place might
have been uninhabited for all you knew like
that time on the stone the child on the stone
where none ever came

(Silence 10 seconds. Breath audible. After 3
seconds eyes open.)

B : or alone in the same the same scenes making it
up that way to keep it going keep it out on
the stone (eyes close) alone on the end of the
stone with the wheat and blue or the towpath
alone on the towpath with the ghosts of the
mules the drowned rat or bird or whatever it
was floating off into the sunset till you could
see it no more nothing stirring only the water
and the sun going down till it went down and you
vanished all vanished.

(p.28)

The ghosts, the sunset and the vanishing in voice B counterpoint the
increasing ontological insecurity in voice A ("not knowing where you
were or when you were or what") and as the Listener has his second
breathing space the imagery of the two voices seems almost to
deliquesce into one mass. This ten-second silence (the second)
ushers in the final section of the play. New images now appear in
voices A and C. Taking up "the child on the stone", A produces the
clearest mirror-image yet of what is happening in the play itself :

none ever came but the child on the stone among
the giant nettles with the light coming in where
the wall had crumbled away poring on his book well
on into the night some moods the moonlight and
they all out on the roads looking for him or
making up talk breaking up two or more talking
to himself being together that way where none
ever came...¹³

(p.28)

...eleven or twelve in the ruin on the flat stone

among the nettles in the dark or moonlight muttering
away now one voice now another there was childhood
for you...

(p.29)

The ambiguity of "eleven or twelve in the ruin" is an important one: it might mean eleven or twelve voices "muttering away now one...now another", but it also refers to the time ("well on into the night") and the connotations of "eleven [o'clock] or twelve [o'clock] ": as the time in the fiction approaches midnight, the play approaches its final stages. The feeling of being there is now more than ever made to seem a matter of being perceived: "they" are "all out on the roads looking" for the child on the stone in the ruin; the "passers" pause "to gape at the scandal huddled there in the sun" on the doorstep, "clutching the nightbag drooling away out loud eyes closed and the white hair pouring out down from under the hat".¹⁴ Voice C provides the focus of significance for the imagery of being perceived :

perhaps fear of ejection having clearly no warrant
in the place to say nothing of the loathsome
appearance so this look round for once at your
fellow bastards thanking God for once bad and all
as you were you were not as they till it dawned
that for all the loathing you were getting you
might as well not have been there at all the eyes
passing over you and through you like so much thin
air was that the time or was that another time
another place another time.

(p.29)

That this realisation is crucial is indicated by the suggestions in voices B and A (respectively) that they are at last approaching "that time": "...till the time came in the end...till that time came ..." (p.29). We have assumed throughout the play that since the Listener's fictions have all been set in the "past", that is, told in the past tense, "that time" must be gone, a moment in the past ("when

was that..."). But it now becomes clear that "that time" is an approaching moment, the moment when the Listener will be able to dispense with his voices and stop "making himself all up again" : the "future" moment is being sought out in the "present" state by the invention of fictions of the "past", and "that time", the achieved moment, will be in fact timeless: it is the still point in the flux, being outside time. Like Mouth striving to "hit on it in the end" and May "revolving...It all" in an attempt to say "how it was", the Listener is using his voices to search out the "sign or set of words" which, by "fixing" "that time", will release him from his penum. It is a search through the meaningless flux of time and the existences-by-proxy it both necessitates and throws up to find a timeless centre of real being.

And yet —as ever — being is impossible because it is at odds with existence. The achievement of "that time" cannot be conceived of as anything other than non-existence — and there is an easier way to that : the abandonment of the voices and the existences-by-proxy they provide. In the last "round" of voices, the abandonment of fiction is achieved in the only possible way — by inventing fictions of abandonment :

B : that time in the end when you tried and
couldn't by the window in the dark and the
owl flown to hoot at someone else or back
with a shrew to its hollow tree and not another
sound hour after hour hour after hour not a
sound when you tried and tried and couldn't
anymore no words left to keep it out so gave
it up gave up there by the window in the dark
or moonlight gave up for good and let it in
and nothing the worse a great shroud billowing
in all over you on top of you and little or
nothing the worse little or nothing

A : back down to the wharf with the nightbag and
the old green greatcoat your father left you
trailing the ground and the white hair
pouring out from under the hat till that time
came on down neither right nor left not a curse
for the old scenes the old names not a thought
in your head only get back on board and away
to hell out of it and never come back or was
that another time all that another time was
there ever any other time but that time away
to hell out of it all and never come back

C : not a sound only the old breath and the leaves
turning and then suddenly this dust whole place
suddenly full of dust when you opened your eyes
from floor to ceiling nothing only dust and not
a sound only what was it it said come and gone
was that it something like that come and gone
come and gone no one come and gone in no time
gone in no time

(Silence 10 seconds. Breath audible. After 3 seconds
smile, toothless for preference. Hold 5 seconds
till fade out and curtain.)

(p.30)

This is an end, perhaps the only unambiguous end in Beckett's whole oeuvre (though Footfalls also seems to "end"). But it seems to me an uneasy one. The image in voice A pinpoints finely the sense of failure and embittered resignation ("away to hell out of it"), but voice B gives way, in the images of the owl and (more particularly) the "great shroud billowing", to the kind of gothic detail which is artfully muted and placed at arm's length in the "tower" of Words and Music and the "faint chime", "the little church", the candelabrum, the moon, the "shudder of the mind" and the ghosts — Holy or otherwise — of Footfalls. And by the side of the "great shroud" the phrases "little or nothing the worse little or nothing" seem merely to palter with us in double sense; they are curiously inconsequential. Voice C's final image, with its beautiful pun

on "leaves" (sending us back to the earlier idyll of B) and its telling detail, "when you opened your eyes", is a powerful evocation of engulfment, but is it an end? "No time", the final response to the play's question "that time when was it", emerges, like "little or nothing" in voice B, out of an ambiguous platitude brought to life ("came and gone in no time"). It ties the text up neatly but seems to lack the weight of a real ending. It is a sign of Beckett's own uneasiness, I think, that he gives way to whimsy when it comes to an important stage direction: "After 5 seconds smile, toothless for preference." In this crucial context, whimsy ("for preference") amounts to a somewhat embarrassed gesture of self-defence. The Listener's smile is not an adequate end. What is meant as a smile of acceptance becomes merely a grotesque joke, and That Time comes to grief at its end because it wants too hastily to make an end.

But of course That Time is not an end. To date (1978) Beckett's last work for the stage is Footfalls (1976) which was, like Not I, written especially for Billie Whitelaw. It is indeed another variation on the "Not I" theme. However no two pieces could be more dissimilar in effect. The buzzing word — cascade of the earlier play has become a trance-like whisper: "Deep asleep. (Pause.) I heard you in my deep sleep. (Pause.) There is no sleep so deep I would not hear you there" (p.33). The breathless gasping rhythms of Mouth have given way to a slow and exquisitely calculated tread which teases the ear by hinting at a regular metric pattern: "Some nights she would halt, as one frozen by some shudder of the mind, and stand stark still till she could move again" (p.36). Not I was over almost in a flash — "not unduly concerned with intelligibility", whereas "the pace of Beckett's production

of Footfalls can be gauged by the fact that a text totalling approximately a thousand words took some thirty minutes to complete".¹⁵

... This is Beckett's dramatic writing at its most self-consciously musical and poetic.

No less than Not I and That Time, Footfalls is about dissociation from self and existence-by-proxy, but it differs so widely, from the earlier play in terms of tempo and effect, and from both in its stage-picture, because it seeks to handle its subject in a different way. Footfalls is Beckett's ghost-play. The ghostly figure is taken as the type of a provisional being, one that never really inhabits itself. Where Not I and That Time tackle the problem of the presence of a character on stage by detaching and displacing the protagonist from his or her own body, thus creating eerie or horrendous forms of partial absence, Footfalls responds by dimming the playing area so that it becomes a twilight region between presence and absence, and by having voices which are "both low and slow throughout" (p.33), so that everything we see and hear is perpetually on the point of disappearing. As the curtain goes up the stage is in darkness and we hear a "faint single chime" (p.33). Like the Auditor's "gesture of helpless compassion" with the arms in Not I, this sound punctuates the drama, splitting it into three definite sections; and, again like the Auditor's gesture, which "lessens with each recurrence till scarcely perceptible at third", it serves as an index or an implied commentary on the dramatic development, for although it starts out as "faint", Beckett specifies that it should become progressively fainter until its fourth occurrence[↑] ("Chime even a little fainter still", p.37) at the very end of the play. As this

suggests, although it begins faintly — apart from the chime the voices are "low" and always "no louder", and the lighting is "dim" — Footfalls contrives to trace an etiolation, a fading.

As the light fades up we see May, "dishevelled grey hair, worn grey wrap hiding feet, trailing", pacing with a "clearly audible rhythmic tread" from right to left and back again along a strip "downstage, parallel with front, length nine steps, width one metre, a little off centre audience right". (The assymetry suggests the possibility of a presence other than May's: she is not allowed centre-stage for her pacing.) The lighting is "dim, strongest at floor level, less on body, least on head" (All p.33). This is another attempt to puzzle the viewer's visual nerve: to what extent does our sense of somebody's presence depend on our being able to see his or her face clearly? Even the light does not really acknowledge May's presence, for what it illuminates is, strictly speaking, not her figure but the strip. Thus her status is that of ^a/ghostly epiphenomenon rather than of a real phenomenon: she is discovered rather than lit.

May stops pacing, "halts, facing front at R", and begins a dialogue with a "Woman's voice from dark upstage" :

M : Mother. (Pause. No louder.) Mother.
(Pause.)

V : Yes, May.

M : Were you asleep?

V : Deep asleep. (Pause.) I heard you in my deep sleep. (Pause.) There is no sleep so deep I would not hear you there. (Pause. M resumes pacing. Four lengths. After first length, synchronous with steps.) One two three four five six seven wheel one two three four five six seven wheel. (Free.) Will you not try to snatch a little sleep?

(pp.33-4)

The relationship between mother and daughter seems to be preternatural. Is it even a relationship between mother and daughter? The mother's voice is specified only as a "woman's voice (V) ", and it comes out of the dark upstage. Is there a mother? She responds to two calls, the second specified as "no louder" than the first, yet the mother says she was woken from a deep sleep — or rather she does not say she was woken, just that she heard her daughter's call. Sleep is not so much a state ("in it") as a far-away place — "there" — a world of near-oblivion. And yet the mother hears. It is as though May's voice were in her mother's head; whatever the case the relationship between the two seems to be one of psychic intimacy. The telling of May's paces, "synchronous with steps", underlines the point. If May is part of her mother, the mother seems to be part of May. They cannot exist without each other; the external situation indicates as much. The mother is bedridden and entirely reliant upon ^{the} daughter. The relationship seems symbiotic, May and her mother complementing each other: the mother is "deep asleep" and she, presumably, will talk if May tries to "snatch a little sleep". May questions her mother : "Would you like me to inject you again?...Would you like me to change your position again?" (p.34) The injection and the position take on extra resonance: the injection, perhaps a pain-killer, might be to sedate the mother's voice — for to us the mother is the voice; likewise her "position" means her position in relation to the part of the stage we can see. "Yes", the voice answers to both questions, "but it is too soon". Although even at this point we sense that the mother's "position" might be fictional, the reality of the scene is touchingly realised by May. Like Henry in Embers, May aims for "realism", her ideal is to create a true impersonal otherness. It

is our sense of the mother's concrete otherness at this point which creates such a poignant effect; our sense, that is, simply of a relationship between child and mother :

M : Straighten your pillows? (Pause.) Change your drawsheet? (Pause.) Pass you the bedpan? (Pause.) The warming-pan? (Pause.) Dress your sores? (Pause.) Sponge you down? (Pause.) Moisten your poor lips? (Pause.) Pray with you? (Pause.) For you? (Pause.) Again.

(Pause.)

V : Yes, but it is too soon.

(p.34)

May tells her mother that she is "eighty-nine, ninety" and, just as the daughter knows the mother's age, the mother knows the daughter's age ("In your forties"). "I had you late" the voice tells May (adding: "In life"): "Forgive me again. (Pause.) Forgive me again." And as May starts pacing again, her mother asks

V : Will you never have done? (Pause.) Will you never have done...revolving it all?

M : (Halting.) It?

V : It all. (Pause.) In your poor mind. (Pause.) It all. (Pause.) It all.

(p.34)

It is what the Auditor in Not I might have said, had he-she-it ("sex undeterminable") had a mouth to say it with. The "revolving" is "one two three four five six seven wheel..." The reason for her need to "revolve", and the nature of "It", emerge from the next section of the play.

The lights fade, "all in darkness", the steps have ceased, the chime is heard "a little fainter", the lights "fade up to a little less on strip" and May is "discovered facing front at R." (pp.34-5) But it is not her voice we hear.

V : I walk here now. (Pause.) Rather I come and stand. (Pause.) At nightfall. (Pause.) She fancies she is alone. (Pause.) See how still she stands, how stark, with her face to the wall. (Pause.) How outwardly unmoved. (Pause.) She has not been out since girlhood. (Pause.) Not out since girlhood. (Pause.) Where is she, it may be asked. (Pause.) Why, in the old home, the same where she — (Pause.) The same where she began. (Pause.) Where it began. (Pause.) It all began.

(p.35)

The original (pre-production) 1976 text makes the new dramatic situation (and the play with the word "out") explicit — clumsily so, Beckett must have thought :

I walk here now. (Pause.) Rather I come and stand. (Pause.) At nightfall. (Pause.) My voice is in her mind.

(Footfalls, p.11, my emphasis.)

If the voice is in her mind, May must have invented it. Yet the voice — or rather the "owner" of it — seems autonomous. Someone or something — which May calls "mother" — is both inside her mind and independent of it. The voice speaks for May, at least it speaks for the figure we see on the stage : "I walk here now...Rather I come and stand"; but it also speaks for itself, a "self" we cannot see but which we infer, from what we are told, is nonetheless there : "She fancies she is alone." Throughout this section of the play

the voice from out of the "dark, backstage" provides a commentary on the figure we see, dimly lit, in front of us, but the commentary bespeaks a degree of intimacy which suggests that the voice is as much a presence watching May as we ourselves are. This voice claims to "walk here now", to "come and stand", and to see — what is more, to see with us :

But let us watch her move, in silence. (M paces. Towards end of second length.) Watch how feat she wheels. (M turns, paces. Synchronous with steps third length.) Seven, eight, nine, wheel.

(p.35)

The voice, both "there" and not "there", is a presenter which seems to partake of the thing it presents: like May it takes "steps" (the synchronous words themselves); it even claims to share her mind, but like the theatre audience it rests apart to "watch how feat she wheels", a "self" split off from its body.

The ontological instability which is the chief characteristic of the stage-picture and the dramatic situation is also, not surprisingly, the subject of a story the Voice now tells about May. Indeed the introduction to the story itself seems to compound the prevailing insecurity. If May is the subject of the Voice's story, is she not in some sense a creation of the Voice? Is the May we see in front of us a creation of the Voice? When the Voice tells us that May is "outwardly unmoved" and that "she has not been out since girlhood... Not out since girlhood" we might recall the two "outings" of the Opener in Cascando, completed by the return to "the inn". The Voice's story is indeed about May's girlhood. "Where is she, it may be asked" remarks the Voice, underlining the equivocations of "out" (out of the

head or out of the home); "Why, in the old home, the same where she —... The same where she began...Where it began...It all began." "It", then, is May's life: this is what she revolves, and the Voice presents us with a dramatised story of her earlier revolutions. The revolving is May's own particular cross: "When other girls of her age were out at... lacrosse she was already here. (Pause.) At this."

Till one night, while still little more than a child, she called her mother and said, Mother, this is not enough. The mother: Not enough? May — the child's given name — May: Not enough. The mother: What do you mean, May, not enough, what can you possibly mean, May, not enough? May: I mean, Mother, that I must hear the feet, however faint they fall. The mother: The motion alone is not enough? May: No, Mother, the motion alone is not enough, I must hear the feet, however faint they fall.

(p.35)

The distancing "dramatised" narrative style ("May:...the mother...") is familiar from the Bolton-Holloway story in Embers; and — more important than this — the mother's quiet, insinuating tone recalls Ada's with its eerily soothing repetitiveness ("not enough..."): "It's silly to say it keeps you from hearing it, it doesn't keep you from hearing it and even if it does you shouldn't be hearing it...And why life?...Why life, Henry?" The reminiscence of tone is not accidental. Ada is trying to get Henry to commit suicide, psychic if not physical; to abandon himself to the sea within his head. May's mother too is insinuating an abandonment. "I must hear the feet, however faint they fall", says May. She needs the sound on the carpet, as we need the same sound on the stage, to reassure herself at every moment that she is there. It is a regular sound which aspires to solidity and definition, like all the regularly rhythmic, "hard" sounds in

Embers which help Henry to maintain the differentiated solidity of his own identity against the "sucking" of the sea. The "clearly audible rhythmic tread" of Footfalls is an assurance, for us as well as for her, of May's presence. It is this idea of presence that the mother of the story seems momentarily to threaten with her eerie puzzlement: "What do you mean, May, not enough, what can you possibly mean, May, not enough?" This story is the first tentative manifestation of the play's inner dynamic: the struggle between the desire to be there, that is, the desire truly to be, and the yearning to be gone, not there. This dynamic never crystallised in Not I : there the drive towards being as still being there (which is itself, as we saw, contradictory) is too strong. In Footfalls, a calmer play, peace is being made with non-being. May too "tells how it was...Tries to tell how it was"(p.35) but she is apter to embrace oblivion than Mouth.

The lights fade out again and the steps cease; the chime is heard "a little fainter still" and when the lights "fade up to a little less still on strip" we enter into the final section of the play. May, "discovered facing front at R.," is to tell us her "sequel" ("seek well":the pun is intended) to the voice's story. However, though the story was about her in her girlhood May continues it in the third person: "A little later, when she was quite forgotten, she began to — (Pause.) A little later, when as though she had never been, she began to walk. (Pause.) At nightfall." The narrative comes to mirror the stage-image, exactly as it does in Not I; indeed, it is clear now that this is another "Not I" situation :

Slip out at nightfall and into the little church by the north door,¹⁶ always locked at

that hour, and walk, up and down, up and down, his poor arm. (Pause.) Some nights she would halt, as one frozen by some shudder of the mind, and stand stark still till she could move again. But many also were the nights when she paced without pause, up and down, up and down, before vanishing the way she came. (Pause.) No sound. (Pause.) None at least to be heard. (Pause.) The semblance. (Pause. Resumes pacing.) After two lengths halts facing front at R...

(p.36) .

"The semblance", of course, of what we see in front of us — but set in a fictive context which is decidedly gothic (we might remember the tower in Words and Music) : "nightfall...the little church...the north door...shudder of the mind"; the "faint chimes" (followed by "pause for echoes") which punctuate the play. This is a world of ghosts; even the crowning pun of May's description of the figure is splendidly gothic :

The semblance. Faint, though by no means invisible, in a certain light. (Pause.) Given the right light. (Pause.) Grey rather than white, a pale shade of grey. (Pause.) Tattered. (Pause.) A tangle of tatters. (Pause.) A faint tangle of pale grey tatters. (Pause.) Watch it pass — (pause) — watch her pass before the candelabrum, how its flames, their light... like moon through passing rack.

(p.36)

In performance Billie Whitelaw rendered the last phrase thus : "like moon through passing — (pause)— rack". The scene is a melodramatic version of what we see on the stage, decked out with all the props of gothic fiction : the tatters, the candelabrum, the moon and (punningly) the rack. The oblique reference to the crucifixion (going with the "lacrosse" we heard earlier) in "his poor arm" as May's character walks up and down the north aisle might also be thought somewhat gothic. Another "semblance" worth noting

is a ghost which haunted Hamm's refuge in Endgame: Dicken's'

Miss Havisham :

She was dressed in rich materials — satins, and lace, and silks — all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white...

It was not in the first few moments that I saw all these things, though I saw more of them in the first moments than might be supposed.

But, I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow.

She looked all round the room in a glaring manner, and then said, leaning on me while her hand twitched my shoulder, "Come, come, come! Walk me, walk me!"

(Great Expectations, ch.8, 11)

May now starts to narrate an episode which took place "one late autumn Sunday evening...after worship, after a few half-hearted mouthfuls" (an anatomical touch worthy of Not I), between "old Mrs. Winter, whom the reader will remember" (p.36), and her daughter. Yet "the daughter's given name, as the reader will remember" is not the name we remember, May, but an anagram of it, Amy. May's story must be about "she", not "I", and just as "May" is displaced into "Amy", so the spectator is displaced into "reader": our consciousness of May — Amy's putative status — is intensified by a consciousness of our own putative status (one which is, in other words, endowed upon us by the play) as "readers".

May's identification with Amy is made explicit in her narration :

What is it, Mother, said the daughter, a most strange girl, though scarcely a girl any more...
(brokenly)...dreadfully un —...¹⁷ (Pause. Normal voice) What is it, Mother, are you not feeling yourself?

(pp.36-7)

The semi-serious equivocation of the last question here (compare "— So there you are again". "Am I?") introduces the subject of the dialogue which follows : ontological instability — which is, indeed, the subject of the whole play. The scene begins with a Beckettian emblem of crisis : Mrs. Winter "fixes" Amy "full in the eye"; she asks her daughter if she observed "anything...strange at Evensong" :

Amy : No, Mother, I did not. Mrs. W: Perhaps it was just my fancy. Amy : Just what exactly, Mother, did you perhaps fancy it was? (Pause.) Just what exactly, Mother, did you perhaps fancy this...strange thing was you observed? (Pause.) Mrs. W: You yourself observed nothing...strange? Amy : No, Mother, I myself did not, to put it mildly. Mrs. W: What do you mean, Amy, to put it mildly, what can you possibly mean, Amy, to put it mildly? Amy : I mean, Mother, that to say I observed nothing...strange is indeed to put it mildly. For I observed nothing of any kind, strange or otherwise. I saw nothing, heard nothing, of any kind. I was not there. Mrs. W: Not there? Amy : Not there. Mrs. W: But I heard you respond. (Pause.) I heard you say Amen. (Pause.) How could you have responded if you were not there? (Pause.) How could you possibly have said Amen if, as you claim, you were not there? (Pause.) The love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all, now, and for evermore. Amen. (Pause.) I heard you distinctly.

(p.37)

If Footfalls is Beckett's most difficult and idiosyncratic play to date — and I think it is — this is the most difficult and idiosyncratic writing in it. It is nudged along inexorably by a linguistic awareness so acute as to seem almost abnormal (but what would an "abnormal" awareness of language be like? Is there a "normal" one really?) Words seem to be scrutinized under a microscope of rhythm, tone, repetition and emphasis for what little they can yield. Indeed this scrutiny is part of the encounter between mother and daughter; the linguistic precision of the exchange results in a sinister and

insinuating dramatic tone : "Just what exactly, Mother, did you perhaps fancy this...strange thing was you observed." Each word seems to have been tweezered into place: the interposed "Mother" relieves the strange juxtaposition "just what exactly...did you perhaps fancy", where a gesture at precision and definition is not merely negated (in "perhaps") but dispersed altogether by the verb. And what does it amount to for someone to "exactly...perhaps fancy"? In fact the phrase may be taken to mirror in little the dramatic strategy of Footfalls : a fiction is at first (exactly) presented, then (perhaps) doubted and finally (fancy) revealed as fiction, so that it is both there and not there. The verbal formulation "exactly...perhaps fancy" strives to present a simultaneous presence and non-presence because it is part of a dialogue about presence and non-presence. Likewise the reflexive pronouns, which seem at first merely pedantic (and thereby faintly comical) : "You yourself observed nothing...strange...No, Mother, I myself did not..." The ambiguity is so faint and faintly underlined that it too might be thought pedantic : "You observed nothing when you observed yourself? ...No, I observed nothing when I observed myself..." The "I" is both there (observing) and (when observed) not there. Amy's statements progress from presence to non-presence (via the repeated "to put it mildly") : "For I observed nothing of any kind, strange or otherwise. I saw nothing, heard nothing, of any kind. I was not there." The "strange thing" observed or unobserved must be May, pacing up and down the aisle, the "vice-exister" of Amy — or is Amy the "vice-exister" of May? This is the "fact" upon which the contradiction of the dialogue centres: the precarious ambivalent presence or non-presence of the creator-created. At the centre of Footfalls is a cluster of existences-by-proxy but no one definite solid being.

Katharine Worth senses this when she asks: "Who is it who "walks" like a ghost, the woman who is only a voice or the figure we actually see walking; which of them is most there, and what does 'there' mean? ...The lighted strip of stage is no more - nor less - real than the place where the mother is..."¹⁸ And Martin Esslin when he ponders Amy's "I was not there" :

Perhaps the emphasis here lies not so much on the word 'there' as on 'I'? Perhaps the phrase should be stressed : I was not there. In which case the name Amy might refer to the question Am I? And Amy's answer to her mother might simply indicate that there might have been someone there, but Not I. And if the name Amy might be so interpreted, might not the name May (its anagram) not also be seen as the subjective incarnation of the verb 'to be', indicating potentially (sic) or possibility of being?¹⁹

Predictably it is Hugh Kenner, in the newspaper review from which I have already quoted, who sums up best :

Ends and Odds contains "Footfalls", in which May and her invisible mother are each as it were the other's fantasy (was there ever a May? Is she the daughter her mother never had?) In the mother's voice May says words she can never have said, and then in May's voice, which is perhaps her mother's modulated, a fantasized "old Mrs. Winter" conducts a dialogue with a daughter who was "not there". May is surely "not there", though we saw no one but her, and sure enough, at the last fade-up of light we cannot see her, nor hear any voice at all.²⁰

Here is that ending. May "resumes pacing. After three steps halts without facing front. Long pause. Resumes pacing, halts facing front at R. Long pause":

M : Amy. (Pause. No louder.) Amy. (Pause.) Yes, Mother. (Pause.) Will you never have done. (Pause.) Will you never have done...revolving it all? (Pause.) It? (Pause.) It all. (Pause.)

In your poor mind. (Pause.) It all. (Pause.)
It all.

(Pause. Fade out on strip. All in darkness.)

(Pause.)

(Chime even a little fainter still. Pause for
echoes.)

(Fade up to even a little less still on strip.)

(No trace of MAY.)

(Hold ten seconds.)

(Fade out.)

(Curtain.)

(p.37)

Kenner's description is good but (doubtless of necessity since this was only a newspaper review) oversimple. It does not seem even to acknowledge the dynamic of the play's closing seconds, the tension which underpins the dialogue between Amy and Mrs. Winter and which issues in their respective contradictory assertions : "I was not there...But I heard you respond...How could you have responded if you were not there?" As her name indicates, "Mrs. Winter" is the denier of the re-awakening fictions of "May" (compare "the month of May" in Cascando and the "April morning" in Not I), and what she denies in this last dialogue is not a fiction of presence — as we should perhaps expect — but a fiction of absence. May/Amy — whatever her name might be — claims first that she "observed nothing" of the pacing woman we ourselves are observing (for that is the "strange" something), and then, taking the logical step, that she was not there herself: self-perception could not take place because there existed no self to perceive. But "Mrs. Winter" insists on a presence, as indeed we must if we are to believe our eyes: there is something there — and something "strange" too — even if it

is only an existence by proxy. The possibility always exists that May may be there, and what "Mrs. Winter" is endeavouring to do when she insists on having heard Amy's responses — as we heard, and only heard, the voices' responses to May earlier in the play — is to persuade May/Amy to abandon her fictions and resign herself to an authentic absence. That authentic absence is what we see when we witness the final tableau : "No trace of MAY". May has submitted to the promptings of that part of her mind which "Mrs. Winter" represents and has truly given up her created ghosts. The uttering of the Amen ("So be it") presages her surrender : "I heard you say Amen...The love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all, now, and for evermore. Amen...I heard you distinctly." "Us all" are the fictions which, now May has abandoned her attempt to maintain their otherness, are at last in the fellowship of this hole-y ("tangle of tatters") ghost. May gathers them all into herself, speaking for Amy, for her mother, for May and for the mother's voice. Then creator and created disappear, to be revolved no more. May and her mother's voice, no less than "Amy" and "Mrs. Winter", were invented, provisional beings: the emblematic nature of the names suggested as much. (May is "the child's given name", and it is important that we should be aware of its being "given".) We have not only heard about proxy existences; we have also seen one in the ghostly, tattered "presence" of "May", who perhaps may never have been there after all, properly speaking. And that is why her given name is May. Pun intended.

The ghostly figure treading to-and-fro across the boards is another stab at the old problem of presence in the theatre, the problem which has haunted Beckett throughout his career as a dramatist. In that

sense the endeavour of the play is certainly not new. But there is I think something here that was not here before in Beckett's drama — something which was unsuccessfully attempted in the previous play, That Time. Footfalls does appear to make an end. Finally, there is "no trace of MAY": her Amen is an acceptance. She allows herself to be shrouded by the void which every Beckett protagonist since Waiting for Godot has sought to escape. Footfalls may not be Beckett's last play, but it is the first one which succeeds in making a real, unambiguous end for itself.

The Beckett ending is a resignation; the creator's resignation of his (or her) will in the face of the void of identity which he (or she) has always sought to keep at bay by an unceasing creative effort. Resignation of the creative will lets in the void which finally annihilates the existing consciousness. That is a real ending. The characteristic Beckett structure has however always been cyclic, a musical da capo, called into being by the characters' refusal to resign the creative will. Vladimir and Estragon reach a near-identical impasse in both acts : "Well? Shall we go?" "Yes, let's go." They do not move. They cannot leave the stage, for that would mean resigning what presence they have. Hamm's resignation is as ambiguous as everything else in his endgame. Is his closing "renunciation" also only part of the game? Henry in Embers is "on the brink of it", but we cannot say further. Winnie and Willie are even more enigmatic, though her last words are "happy" enough, suggesting that she will continue to "keep it up". The "characters" of Play go round and round, terribly and grotesquely, and there are no signs of relinquishment. Similarly in Not I : the velocity of Voice only increases, banishing even the "helpless

compassion" of the Auditor. There is no resignation, only circularity. But That Time comes to rest, if unsatisfactorily, in images of resignation, and May's Amen really does offer a conclusion. Like Bram van Velde (at last), she "submits wholly".

CONCLUSION

Let us return to the starting point of this study, J.R. Harvey's charge of insincerity :

But in speaking of the falsity of Mr. Beckett's art to itself, one might mean, rather, the way in which it resembles that of Francis Bacon — an artist who perhaps profits from the same susceptibility in modern taste as Mr. Beckett. One recognises Mr. Bacon's skill in making oil-paint writhe and howl like that. But then, is there not an odd lusciousness in the mutilation, something overdone? And is not his painting — for an art so ambitiously tragic — gaudy?

The fact that Mr. Beckett's characters are always submitted to such total, and such very physical, degradation — so repeatedly crippled and mutilated — so often limbless, stinking, in dustbins and jars — suggests a crudity in the art, a sensationalism, that strikes an odd note in the work of a man who offers to get deep inside the most serious plight of the human spirit.¹

Harvey is thinking chiefly of the prose here, but a similar complaint might be made about the Beckett stage-picture (indeed the name of Francis Bacon was inevitably invoked when the disembodied Mouth of Not I first appeared²). The criticism is based on a misconception of what "character" is in Beckett. In drama the Beckett "character" is, as I have tried to show, a parody presence; what Harvey judges to be gaudy, crude or merely sensational must be thought of ^{as} the exaggeration of physical characteristics which is one of Beckett's methods of parody. If the Actor is, as Hugh Kenner describes him, "all circumference and no center", then the gaudiness or crudity which parodies presence is the inevitable result of there being no real presence, no centre. We see in front of us layers of circumference, perpetually self-creating but also — since essential presence is unimaginable — perpetually self-parodying. The gaudiness of Hamm and Winnie is something of which they themselves are amply aware because they have created it.

Harvey's criticism has its root in the problem with which we started out, that of the implicit commitment to expression of all art. Qui perd gagne : for the artist who writes about failure the situation is inevitable because of the intrinsically expressive nature of art. Expression is indeed the condition of art: even the loser can win when he writes! Consequently an art of failure, the art of an authentic loss ("Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done with losing," E, p.51) is a problem, perhaps the ultimate Modernist problem. Beckett, whose endgame is the endgame of Modernism, responds by developing a drama (as he had developed a prose) which seeks to perfect itself in the enactment of its own self-annihilation, a drama, that is, of the terminal paradox. Through his agency drama is made to reveal and scrutinize its own nature and processes so that its essence is repeatedly discovered by parody. Hugh Kenner writes : "For the work in hand to scrutinize its own mode of being, and having suddenly discerned the conventions upon which it is established to suddenly cancel out (sic) all certainties by forcing on our attention a converging series of fictions, as of mirrors facing one another, this is a familiar Beckett technique."³ The stage is, in Robbe-Grillet's words, "the privileged resort of presence", and yet what is the "presence" of an actor, "a creature all circumference and no center", but a parody of presence? Theatre, after all, plays Beckett's game, though it needs his genius to exploit that circumstance to the full. He confirms his own youthful dictum: "the ideal core of the onion would represent a more appropriate tribute to the labours of poetical excavation than the crown of bay". The impossibility of that "ideal core" is what Beckett termed in 1938 (when he was more given to such phrases than he has been since) "the absolute predicament of particular human identity". And if his drama does

offer (in Harvey's words) to "get deep inside the most serious plight of the human spirit", it is in this territory, the shadowy region of the ontological imperative, that it undertakes its explorations.

APPENDIX

It is necessary for me to explain briefly why I have neglected to examine the other "finished" radio play of the early 'sixties, Words and Music. There are two reasons : firstly — and more simply — I have taken Cascando to be representative of the early 'sixties radio plays as regards imaginative conception and dramatic method (though with, I hope, due regard to its own distinctive features). To discuss these aspects of Words and Music would be essentially to repeat much that I have said about Cascando; to repeat it, indeed, in a less clear form, for — and this is my second reason — Words and Music seems to me not as successful as Cascando. It might be retorted that the former play is about something slightly different from the latter, that its centre of gravity is in another place. The charge against Words and Music is exactly this: What is at its centre?

In the play Croak, the master, arrives late to command "Joe" (Words) and "Bob" (Music) because, whilst "in the tower" ("tour d'ébène"?) he has seen "the face...On the stairs" (P2R, p.28). He specifies for his servants "themes", first of Love (they cannot manage this), then of Age. Words and Music produce a song about an old man pondering in the ashes of a fire a love "Who loved could not be won/ Or won not loved" and seeing "the face in the ashes" (p.32). Wanting more, Croak orders them to create the face itself, which they do, amidst what seems to be a sexual tumult ("Irrepressible burst of spreading and subsiding music with vain protestations..."p.34), producing a song about looking into the eyes of the face :

Then down a little way
Through the trash
Towards where
All dark no begging
No giving no words
No sense no need
Through the scum
Down a little way
To whence one glimpse
Of that wellhead. (p.35)

Like the one on Age, it is a fine poem (Beckett's finest?), but it creates a dramatic problem. When Croak hears it, he lets fall his club, symbol of creative control, and leaves Bob and Joe to themselves. The play ends in their abandonment. It is a puzzling ending. Why should Croak resign his creative will (for that is surely how this is to be understood) now? Because, presumably, he has been afforded "one glimpse/Of that wellhead". But what is the significance of this glimpse? The play gives us no help. It is probably a creative spring (the sexual imagery connected with the face would reinforce this), perhaps his own. But why should it have this effect? To say that the return to the creative source frees Croak of his penum is to supply something the play never even suggests. The image of the wellhead is at the very centre of the play, and yet it is vague and ill-defined, uncreated even. It may seem strange to level against this, the playwright of the inexpressible, the charge of not having fully expressed something. Yet we have seen that Embers, which is no less a play about the inability to end or to express fully, is in spite of this satisfyingly organised and has a clearly articulated centre. Words and Music presents an interpretative problem because it is flawed. It is less tough and more endearing than Cascando, but Cascando is a finer work.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION.

1. Raymond Federman, Journey to Chaos : Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction (London: Univ. of California Press, 1966).
2. "La Vieille Voix Faible", Cambridge Quarterly, 1 (1966), 393.
3. Molloy: Malone Dies: The Unnamable (London: John Calder, 1959), pp.31-2. Further references are to Trilogy.
4. Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit (London: John Calder, 1965), p.103. (My emphasis.) Since I am quoting extensively from both Proust and Three Dialogues in the present section, I refer to page numbers only and not to the abbreviation (P3D).
5. Cf. Beckett's comment : "At that level you break up words to diminish shame. Painting and music have so much better a chance". Quoted in Lawrence E. Harvey, Samuel Beckett : Poet & Critic (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), p.249. Further references are to Poet & Critic.
6. Concepts of Criticism, ed. Stephen G. Nichols Jr. (London: Yale Univ. Press, 1963), p.220.
7. Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross (1817; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), I, 182.
8. Op. cit., p.186.
9. Op. cit., p.202.
10. Discriminations (London: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), p.124.
11. See "Kubla Khan", ll. 42-54.
12. Hyperion, III, l.113.
13. To J. A. Hessey, The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1958), I, 374.
14. To Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818, Letters I, 387.
15. Keats and Embarrassment (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p.72.
16. Ends and Odds: Plays and Sketches (London: Faber & Faber, 1977), p.102. Further references (included in text) are to abbreviation EAO.

17. Play : and Two Short Pieces for Radio (London: Faber & Faber 1964), p.48. Further references (included in text) are to abbreviation P2R.
18. "Yes, a little creature, I shall try and make a little creature, to hold in my arms, a little creature in my image, no matter what I say. And seeing what a poor thing I have made, or how like myself, I shall eat it." Trilogy, p.226.
19. Quoted in Wellek, Discriminations, p.114.
20. From "Variations sur un sujet" in Mallarmé, The Poems, a bilingual edition, trans. and intro. Keith Bosley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p.43.
21. Letter to Paul Demeny, 15 May 1871. Quoted in Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle : A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (1931; Glasgow: Collins, 1961), p.215.
22. The Poems, p.49.
23. Mallarmé and the Symbolist Drama (Detroit : Wayne State Univ. Press, 1963), p.76.
24. Discriminations, p.115.
25. The idea of the "Grand Oeuvre", especially if dramatic (as Haskell M. Block argues it was), bears obvious similarities to that of the Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk, and indeed was partially influenced by it. (See Block, pp.75-82.) The general influence of Wagner's theories (as distinct from his creative work) on the symboliste poets hardly needs insisting upon.
26. Block, p.76.
27. Block, loc. cit.
28. Block, p.81.
29. But compare Nietzsche, in an essay of 1873 (two years after the Rimbaud letter quoted earlier) on linguistic truth :

What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms - in short, a sum of human relations which, poetically and rhetorically intensified, became transposed and adorned, and which after long usage by a people seem fixed, canonical and binding on them. Truths are illusions which one has forgotten are illusions, worn-out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the sense, coins which have their obverse

effaced and are now no longer of account as coins but merely as metal.

"On Truth and Falsehood in an Extra-Moral sense".

Quoted in J. P. Stern, Nietzsche (Glasgow: Collins, 1978).

30. The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction. (St. Albans: Granada, 1973), pp. 194-5.
31. Flaubert, Joyce, Beckett: The Stoic Comedians (London: W.H.Allen, 1964), pp.12-13.
32. The Lessons of Modernism (London, Macmillan Press, 1977), pp.109-10.
33. "Denis Devlin", Transition, 27 (1938), 289.
34. The Lessons of Modernism, p.110.
35. "Denis Devlin", p.293.
36. The Criterion, 13 (1934), 705.
37. "Denis Devlin", p.289.
38. Op. cit., p.706.
39. Loc. cit.
40. Sonnets to Orpheus, trans., with intro. and notes by J.B.Leishman (London : Hogarth Press, 1946), p.148.
41. Op. cit., p.149.
42. Cf. the difference between "from an abandoned work" and From an Abandoned Work.
43. Proust (Glasgow: Collins, 1974), pp.133-4. Cf. Beckett: "For in the brightness of art alone can be deciphered the baffled ecstasy that he had known before the inscrutable superficies of a cloud, a triangle, a spire, a flower, a pebble, when the mystery, the essence, the idea, imprisoned in matter, had solicited the beauty of a subject passing by within the shell of his impurity..." (P3D, p.76.)
44. Samuel Beckett (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1965), p.20.
45. Quoted in Scott, p.67.
46. Snapshots and Towards a New Novel, trans. Barbara Wright (London: Calder and Boyars, 1965), pp.54,56.
47. Op. cit., pp.56-7.

48. From an interview with Elizabeth Bergner, BBC Radio 3, July 1977.
49. Poet & Critic, p.247.
50. Trilogy, p.295.
51. "Moody Man of Letters", New York Times, 6 May 1956.
52. All That Fall (London: Faber & Faber, 1957). Further references (included in text) are to abbreviation ATF.
53. "Kinds of Comedy" in The Poet in the Imaginary Museum: Essays of Two Decades, ed. Barry Alpert (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1977), p.60.
54. Loc. cit.
55. Op. cit., p.61.
56. Op. cit., p.60.
57. Poet & Critic, p.249.
58. Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett (London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974), p.164.
59. "The Expelled" in No's Knife: Collected Shorter Prose 1945 - 1966 (London: Calder & Boyars, 1967), p. 24.
60. "The Calmative" in No's Knife, p.26.
61. "The End" in No's Knife, p.67.
62. Trilogy, pp. 92, 176.
63. Endgame and Act Without Words (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), p.28. Further references (included in text) are to abbreviation E.
64. The Stoic Comedians, pp. 106-7.
65. Poet & Critic, p.248.
66. Trilogy, p. 390.
67. Quoted in Christopher Ricks, "The Tragedies of Webster, Tourneur and Middleton: Symbols, Imagery and Conventions" in History of Literature in the English Language: Vol. 3. English Drama to 1710, ed. Ricks (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1971), p.313.

68. In Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1965), p.108.
69. Poet & Critic, p.247.
70. The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p.40.
71. The Divided Self, p.41.
72. Poet & Critic, p.249.
73. Watt (1953; London: Calder & Boyars, 1963), p.248.
74. "Practical Aspects of Theatre, Radio and Television", trans. Helen Watanabe, Journal of Beckett Studies, No.2 (Summer 1977), pp. 83-4.
75. Waiting for Godot (London: Faber & Faber, 1956), p.89. Further references (included in text) are to abbreviation WFG.
76. Trilogy, p. 190.
77. Trilogy, p.226.
78. Trilogy, p. 285.
79. The Divided Self, p.42.
80. The Divided Self, pp. 42-3.

Chapter One : Waiting for Godot.

1. Information from En Attendant Godot, ed. Colin Duckworth (London : George G. Harrap & Co., 1966), xlv ff. But unless otherwise specified, information at the heads of chapters about composition, translation and performance or broadcast is from Beryl S. Fletcher, John Fletcher, Barry Smith and Walter Bachem, A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett (London: Faber and Faber, 1978).
2. Charles Marowitz, "Paris Log", Encore, 9, No.2 (March-April 1962), 44.
3. Op. cit. p.45.
4. Op. cit. p.44.
5. Loc. cit.
6. "Beckett directs Godot", Theater Quarterly, 5, No.19 (1975), 25.

7. Cf. his comment in an interview with Tom Driver : "To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now". "Beckett by the Madeleine", Columbia University Forum, 4 (Summer 1961), 22.
8. Asmus, p.23.
9. Asmus, pp. 23-4.
10. "Beckett's Godot", The New Review, 3, No.26 (May 1976), 66-7.
11. I am indebted to Mr Vincent Mahon for some of the ideas in this paragraph.
12. Op. cit., p.66.
13. Loc. cit.
14. Op. cit., p.67.
15. Ironically, it was to these episodes that Beckett brought his balletic "step-by-step approach".
16. Loc. cit.
17. Op. cit., p.66.
18. Op. cit., p.67.
19. Loc. cit.
20. PMLA, 75 (1960), 137-46.
21. Op. cit., p.137.
22. Op. cit., p. 140.
23. Op. cit., p. 145.
24. Op. cit., p.146.
25. Samuel Beckett, "Dante...Bruno . Vico. .Joyce" in Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress (1929; London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 14.
26. "Samuel Beckett, or "Presence" in the Theatre" in Samuel Beckett, ed. Esslin, p.113.
27. Op. cit., p. 115.
28. Marowitz, p. 44.
29. I am indebted to Dr. Michael Bell for some of the ideas in this paragraph.

Chapter Two : Endgame.

1. "Towards an Understanding of Endgame". in Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Endgame": A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Bell Gale Chevigny (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1969), p. 100.
2. Drama and Reality (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 152.
Gaskell's whole discussion is illuminating on Beckett's rejection of naturalism.
3. See, for example, John Spurling's discussion of the play in: John Fletcher and John Spurling, Beckett: A Study of his Plays (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), p.72 ff.
4. Back to Beckett (Princeton N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), p.153.
5. Quoted in Back to Beckett, p. 142.
6. Quoted in Back to Beckett, p. 152.
7. Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study (London: John Calder, 1962), p. 155.
Further references are to Critical Study.
8. A. Alvarez, Samuel Beckett (Glasgow: Collins, 1973), p. 94.
9. Beckett wrote to his American producer Alan Schneider in a letter dated 12 August 1957 : "My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have head-aches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin." Quoted in Alec Reid, "From Beginning to Date: Some Thoughts on the Plays of Samuel Beckett" in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Criticism, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975), p.66.
10. Quoted in Alec Reid, All I can Manage, More than I could: An Approach to the Plays of Samuel Beckett (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1968), p.71.
11. Alvarez, p.92.
12. Critical Study, p.162.
13. Fin de Partie suivi de Acte sans Paroles (Paris : Éditions de Minuit, 1957) pp. 108-9.
14. Fin de Partie, p.62.
15. Quoted in Hans-Peter Hasselbach, "Samuel Beckett's Endgame : A Structural Analysis", Modern Drama, 19 (1976), 27.

16. Critical Study, p. 164.
17. "Hamm, Clov; and Dramatic Method in Endgame", in Chevigny, p. 62.
18. Op. cit., p. 63.
19. "The Language of Endgame", Tulane Drama Review, 6, No. 4 (June 1962), 116.
20. Stanley Cavell has spotted this pun before me; Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 143.
21. The Plays of Samuel Beckett (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1972), p. 57.
22. Fin de Partie, p. 104.
23. "Hope-less Verse", Hibernia, 24 June 1977, p. 19.
24. The phrase is Kenner's, Critical Study, p. 160.

Chapter Three : All That Fall.

1. Critical Study, pp. 167-8. As is I think apparent, this chapter owes much to Kenner's short account of the play.
2. Student's Guide, p. 77.
3. "Kinds of Comedy" in The Poet in the Imaginary Museum, p. 60.
4. Critical Study, p. 170.
5. See Martin Esslin, "Samuel Beckett and the Art of Broadcasting", Encounter, 45, No. 3 (September 1975), 39.
6. Samuel Beckett (London : Heinemann, 1968), p. 41.
7. Watt, p. 14.
8. "The Symbolic Structure of Samuel Beckett's All That Fall", Modern Drama, 9 (1966), 328-9.

Chapter Four : Krapp's Last Tape.

1. See S. E. Gontarski, "Crapp's First Tapes : Beckett's Manuscript Revisions of Krapp's Last Tape", Journal of Modern Literature, 6 (1977), 61-8.

2. Krapp's Last Tape and Embers (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 12. Further references (included in text) are to abbreviation KE.
3. Pierre Chabert, "Beckett as Director", Gambit, 7, No. 28 (1976), 44. Beckett directed Chabert as Krapp in Paris, April 1975.
4. All I can Manage, p. 24.
5. Krapp Regiebuch, p. 47. Quoted by James Knowlson in "Krapp's Last Tape : the evolution of a play, 1958-75", Journal of Beckett Studies, No. 1 (Winter 1976), p. 63.
6. "The Space and the Sound in Beckett's Theatre" in Beckett the Shape Changer : A Symposium, ed Katharine Worth (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 193.
7. Knowlson, p. 60.
8. Knowlson, pp. 59-60.
9. Krapp Regiebuch, p. 47. Quoted in Knowlson, p. 61.
10. Knowlson, p. 63.
11. Experience into Words (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1974), p. 74.
12. A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett (London : Thames & Hudson, 1973), p. 132.
13. Chabert, p. 42.
14. Quoted in Ronald Hayman, Samuel Beckett, p. 50.
15. Samuel Beckett : The Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1962), p. 249.
16. Here too he is generalising in order to symbolise. Chrysolite is an olive-green gem, and we may remember an earlier "memory" : "What remains of all that misery? A girl in a shabby green coat, on a railway-station platform? No?" (p. 13) Green, the colour of Ireland, is for Krapp the colour of parting and missed opportunities.

Chapter Five : Embers.

1. L'Avant Scene, 313. Quoted by Clas Zilliacus in "Samuel Beckett's Embers : "A Matter of Fundamental Sounds", Modern Drama, 13 (1970), 220.

2. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p. 213.
3. The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1910-23, ed. Max Brod, trans Joseph Kresh and Martin Greenberg (1949; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 397-8.
4. "Religious Imagery in the Plays of Samuel Beckett", in A Collection of Criticism, ed. Ruby Cohn, p. 96.
5. Op. cit., p. 92.
6. Loc. cit.
7. Reader's Guide, p. 166.
8. I am grateful to Dr. Michael Bell for pointing out this pun.
9. It is perhaps worth noting in the light of Henry's attitude towards the sea that Thomas Mann (who ended up in Switzerland) held that "the sea is not a landscape, it is something which brings us face to face with eternity, with nothingness and death, a metaphysical dream, and to stand in the thin air of the regions of eternal snow is a very similar experience". Quoted in W. H. Bruford, The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: "Bildung" from Humboldt to Thomas Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975), p. 219. (And of course those "regions of eternal snow" also figure symbolically in Embers, an ever-present threat to Henry's dying embers.)
10. For "you" the French version (by Beckett and Robert Pinget) has "on".
11. Quoted in Zilliacus, p. 221.
12. Tennyson (Trowbridge: Macmillan Press, 1972), p. 249.
13. There is also an interesting coincidence of fact concerning the two works : Embers was written in 1959, 26 years after Beckett's own father's death; Maud was written in 1854-5, 23 years after Tennyson's father's death. (In Krapp the son plays back the tape of his mother's death 30 years after the event.) It is intriguing too that "within a week after his father's death [Tennyson] slept in the dead man's bed, earnestly desiring to see his ghost, but no ghost came. 'You see', he said, 'ghosts do not come to imaginative people'." (Hallam Lord Tennyson, Materials for a Life

of Alfred Tennyson, draft version. Quoted by Ricks in Tennyson, p. 28.)

14. Tennyson, p.2.
15. Tennyson, p. 253. This suggestion of the bleeding woman has been taken up by Jonathan Wordsworth in " 'What is it, that has been done?' : The Central Problem of Maud", Essays in Criticism, 24 (1974), 356-62.
16. By translating "washout" as "avorton", Beckett (and Robert Pinget) underlines a horrible slang pun (which involves a bleeding woman).
17. Anon., "The Dying of the Light", Times Literary Supplement, 8 January 1960, p. 20.
18. James Joyce, Ulysses (1922; London: Bodley Head, 1960), p. 3.
19. "Interpreting Molloy" in Samuel Beckett Now, ed. and intro. by Melvin J. Friedman (London : Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 163.
20. Civilisation and its Discontents in Complete Psychological Works, trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London : Hogarth Press 1961), vol. 21, p. 68.
21. "Embers and the Sea : Beckettian Intimations of Mortality", Modern Drama, 16 (1973), 322.
22. Op. cit., p. 320.
23. Op. cit., p. 322.
24. The Hidden Order of Art : A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination (St. Albans : Paladin, 1970), p. 304.
25. The narrator of the story refers to it, with a good dose of irony, as "this strong composition", More Pricks than Kicks (1934; London : Pan, 1974), p. 57.
26. Zeifman, p. 93. One assumes that the little book consulted by Henry is a diary or appointments book of some sort, but might it not equally be a bible?
27. Civilisation and its Discontents, p. 66.
28. Alpaugh, p. 321.
29. Poet & Critic, p. 441.
30. Samuel Beckett (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 98.

31. This felicity, tiny as it is, was totally destroyed in the BBC production when, for reasons that escape the present writer, "Argentine" was emended to "Venezuela" and "The Pampas" to "Tibet".
32. Samuel Beckett : The Comic Gamut, p. 250.

Chapter Six : Happy Days.

1. For further details see S. E. Gontarski, "Shaping the Mess" : The Composition of Samuel Beckett's "Happy Days", Diss. Ohio State 1974.
2. Happy Days (London : Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 9. Further references (included in text) are to abbreviation HD.
3. Student's Guide, p. 137.
4. The Plays of Samuel Beckett, p. 91.
5. Samuel Beckett : A New Approach (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1970), p. 123.
6. Alvarez, p. 109.
7. ' "what?...who?...no!...she!" - The Fictionalizers in Beckett's Plays' in A Collection of Criticism, ed. Ruby Cohn, p. 115.
8. One earlier draft of the play makes explicit reference to Willie's inability to satisfy Winnie sexually even in their prime (though at that stage of the composition the characters had not yet been given those names). See Gontarski, p. 103.

Chapter Seven : Cascando.

1. See appendix.
2. See Gontarski, "Shaping the Mess", passim.
3. Modern Drama, 9 (1966), 319-23.
4. "Beckett's Rough for Radio", Journal of Modern Literature, 6 (1977), 103.
5. "The Calmative", No's Knife, p. 35.

6. See Student's Guide, p. 164.
7. "The Space and the Sound in Beckett's Theatre" in Beckett the Shape Changer, p. 215.
8. Cf. the skull-"refuge" of Endgame and the levelled "hollow" of Embers where Henry and Ada "did it at last for the first time" (KE, p. 34).
9. Beckett the Shape Changer, pp. 214-5.
10. Cf. the sea in Embers : "Not this...sucking!" (KE, p. 33)
11. Poet & Critic, p. 248.
12. Beckett the Shape Changer, p. 215.

Chapter Eight : Play.

1. See Richard L. Admussen, "The Manuscripts of Beckett's Play", Modern Drama, 16 (1973), 23-7.
2. Reader's Guide, p. 153.
3. All I can Manage, p. 39.
4. Pierre Chabert, who acted Krapp under the author's direction, writes : "The recorder becomes the girl and there is a scene of tenderness between Krapp and it. The face drops unconsciously, followed by the body and the right arm, coming to rejoin it, attains and touches the surface of the machine." (Chabert, p. 53.)

Chapter Nine : Later Plays.

1. See Pilling, p. 210.
2. "When [Niklaus] Gessner asked him about the contradiction between his writing and his obvious conviction that language could not convey meaning, Beckett replied, 'Que voulez-vous, Monsieur? C'est les mots; on n'a rien d'autre'", Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, rev. ed. (London : Eyre Methuen, 1968), p. 61.
3. Poet & Critic, p. 249.
4. "Being and Non-Being : Samuel Beckett's Not I", Modern Drama, 19 (1976), 45.

5. No's Knife, p. 91.
6. En Attendant Godot, ed. Duckworth, xlviii.
7. Gontarski, "Crapp's First Tapes", p. 61.
8. See Gontarski, "Shaping the Mess".
9. See Admussen, "The Manuscripts of Beckett's Play".
10. Quoted in Pilling, p. 210.
11. Quoted in Enoch Brater, "Dada, surrealism, and the Genesis of Not I", Modern Drama, 18 (1975), 53.
12. See Asmus, "Practical Aspects", p. 92.
13. Cf. Hamm : "Then babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together in the dark" (E, p. 45).
14. Cf. "that old Chinaman long before Christ born with long white hair" (p. 25). Both share the Listener's appearance. (And notice the syntactical ambiguity in the placing of "born" : "before Christ born" or "born with long white hair".)
15. Student's Guide, p. 207.
16. The pamphlet first edition has "south" for "north". Asmus reports that when his German May asked Beckett " 'Why is South Door translated by Nordpforte' " (North Door)?, he replied : " 'That is a correction...South Door is too warm, North Door is colder. You feel cold. The whole time, in the way you hold your body too. Everything is frost and night'. " ("Practical Aspects", p. 85.)
17. The pamphlet first edition has only "dreadfully — " (Footfalls, p.12)
18. "Beckett's Fine Shades", Journal of Beckett Studies, No. 1 (Winter 1976), p. 79.
19. "Voices, Patterns, Voices : Samuel Beckett's later plays", Gambit, 7, No. 28 (1976), 97-8.
20. "Hope-less Verse", p. 19.

Conclusion.

1. "La Vieille Voix Faible", p. 394.
2. From the Faber blurb : "... this is one of those haunting Beckettian images that takes instant root in the imagination exactly like the open-mouthed scream of a Francis Bacon cardinal." Michael Billington in the Guardian.
3. Critical Study, p. 173.

ABBREVIATIONS

Since each chapter of the thesis consists of a study of a particular play, I have found it unnecessary to prefix the abbreviation for a play to every reference in the chapter devoted to that play. Thus in chapter 1, which is about Waiting for Godot, all references to Godot are indicated thus : (p.20), whereas a reference to, say, Endgame, in the same chapter is indicated thus : (E, p. 20). This practice is followed throughout, with the exception of first references, which are given in footnotes, according to standard procedure.

<u>Proust</u>	}	One Volume	P3D
and			
<u>Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit</u>			
<u>Waiting for Godot</u>			WFG
<u>Endgame</u>			E
<u>All That Fall</u>			ATF
<u>Krapp's Last Tape</u>	}	One Volume	KE
and			
<u>Embers</u>			
<u>Happy Days</u>			HD
<u>Cascando</u>	}	One Volume (with <u>Words and Music</u>)	P2R
and			
<u>Play</u>			
<u>Not I</u>	}	All in <u>Ends and Odds</u>	EAO
<u>That Time</u>			
<u>Footfalls</u>			

For details of editions used, see section 1(a) of bibliography following.

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